

Pocket Series }
No. 202.

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POCKET NOVELS



The Indian Avenger.

202



INDIAN AVENGER

I



THE INDIAN AVENGER.

BY W. J. HAMILTON,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

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NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1868, by
BEADLE AND COMPANY,
at the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

THE

INDIAN AVENGER.

CHAPTER I.

THE SURVEYORS.

THE silence was unbroken save by the cry of the wood-bird and the sullen croak of the frog. At times a snake or lizard crawled by. The foliage was green and rich, overhanging a sequestered glade in the midst of an oak forest, one of those plots of ground known as "oak openings." In this beautiful place, where the feet of man rarely trod, all seemed at rest except the myriads of things of the insect world flitting from flower to flower. Bees, whose honey was stored in some hollow tree, miles away, were sucking the treasure from every blossom; and the beauty of the flowers in the openings is without a parallel in this latitude.

The silence was broken at last, for a manly shout rung through the woods, as a young man, scattering the leaves from the bushes all about the glade, broke through into the opening. He was a handsome fellow, in a plain frontier garb—tweed hunting-coat, heavy boots, and slouched hat—carrying in one hand a rifle, and in the other the trident of a surveyor. His shout was answered, and another person came struggling through the bushes into the open ground. This last comer, a youth on the verge of manhood, carried the chain and hatchet used by surveyors, as well as a number of the small view-stakes which belong to the craft. He was dressed very much like the elder, with the exception that he wore a coonskin cap, which had the tail upon it, hanging down on one side in a jaunty manner. He was armed with a rifle, as was his companion, but carried it slung over his shoulder by a leathern strap. Something in the odd twinkle of his eye was irresistible; native humor lurked in every motion of his body, and a stranger would find himself laughing at him, without really

knowing at what he was pleased. The young surveyor sat down on a stump, panting, and cast a gratified glance over the silvan scene.

"Good land here, Dan," he said.

"Good land. There ain't a better country nowhere, I don't care where you look for it, than the oak openings of Minnesota. Things seem to git up and grow here sort o' spontaneous, and that means quicker than git out. I never heard tell of any thing you can't raise here, unless a nigger; *he* won't sprout; the soil ain't adopted to his cultivation, so to speak."

"I suppose a bee-hunter would find a rich treasure here."

"Rich! that ain't any word for it. Oceans of honey over in them there woods ye see blue against the sky. Don't I know—ain't I lined a bee before now? Course I have; and if you'll let me, I'll show you how to do the job, Will."

"Not now, Dan. We have not the time to follow the line, after you have found it; we've got other work to do."

"What a life we've led this year," said the boy. "If anybody had told me then that Dan Williams would be tramping the Minnesota woods, breaking his neck over stumps, fighting bears, talking Indian, and otherwise misbehaving himself, I wouldn't have believed it. But that ain't the p'int. Things got badly mixed down in the Teche country. I was a native-born Southerner, and I wanted to jine them. But I was in the United States jest as long as I had been in Louisiana, and I couldn't find it in my heart to go ag'in the old flag. So here I am, happier than I ever was in my life. But I wish the war was over. It looks bad for a feller twenty years old to have a war going on right under his nose, and he not to have a hand in it, anyhow. Both sides to blame, anyway. Let them fight it out; they'll get sick of it sometime, I judge."

"Don't say any thing more about this unhappy war," said Will. "Let it go; I should have been in it long ago, had not my engagements with the government prevented. They tell me I am doing quite as much good here as I could in the army."

"You are, and I can see it. There ain't another man in the country the Siouxs will hear a word from; and the Lord knows they are bad enough. I see blood in the chief's eye every time we meet. The big black devil thinks that now is the time to give it to the settlers, if ever, and he'll do it, if he ever makes up his mind. There'll be blood shed in Minnesota before the year is out."

"I hope not," said Will. "The last time I saw Panther Slayer he seemed friendly, but complained that the settlers were encroaching on the reservation. They must be careful; it would take but a little now to fan the spark you and I can see, into a flame which shall sweep Minnesota through and through."

"I never could stand an Indian," said Dan—"never; and I think they love me just as well. Now there's Panther Slayer; I'll bet *he'd* like to eat me without salt, and I never said a dozen words to the old snuff-bladder in my life; but he growls as soon as he sees me, like a bear with a sore jaw."

"What have you done to him?" said Will.

"Not a thing," said Dan; "but he sees I don't believe he's friendly to the whites, and no more he ain't; I'll bet on it."

"I hope he is, Dan; it would be a sad thing to have him our enemy," said Will.

"I'd rather have a good square enemy—a chap that didn't make no bones of it, and told you out and out he hated you, than any number of lying friends like Panther Slayer. You'd better believe it; I know he don't mean any good."

At this moment they were interrupted. Two persons had entered the glade on the upper side and were coming toward them. Dan looked at them suspiciously and nudged his companion. One of the new comers was a rough-looking man, and if the countenance was an index, not the sort of person for a bed-fellow in a strange house. One was a small man, with an eye like a hawk, a nose hooked like the beak of an eagle, and a hard, cruel face. He might have been thirty years of age, and yet his hair was turning gray about the temples.

His companion was a burly fellow in a soiled suit of

nomespun—just the sort of man to do the dirty work of a villain—no plotter, but the one to execute, under the guidance of a stronger mind. Both were armed, as usual in the backwoods of Minnesota in those days. They were well mounted—the small man on a sorrel of small size, but with great breadth of chest and length of limb; the other backed a black, with white fore-feet and a star in his forehead—an animal standing seventeen hands high and looking like a beast of great speed and endurance. His owner bestrode a Mexican saddle, and a pair of huge horseman's boots filled the stirrups. In the boot-leg, on the right side, peeped out the hilt of a pistol.

Will had risen from the ground and seated himself upon a stump. Dan stood near, leaning upon his rifle, with a belligerent expression upon his face. It was plain he did not like the strangers, and did not propose to take any pains to conceal the fact.

The smaller horseman looked sharply at the two and reined in his horse.

"Have you seen any Indians about here to-day?" he said, in a quick, peremptory tone, like a man accustomed to give orders and have them obeyed.

His manner somewhat nettled the surveyor.

"Why do you ask?" he said

"Because I want to know," replied the man. "You would do well to answer."

"And what if I do not?"

"Nonsense; we do not need to quarrel. I ask you a question; I want an answer, and a civil one."

"I am always ready to answer civil questions," said Will. "If I have misinterpreted your manner, I beg your pardon; I have seen no Indians to-day."

"Nor yesterday?"

"Yes, I saw one yesterday."

"A Sioux?"

"Yes."

"May I ask his name?"

"Panther Slayer."

"Ah, the chief! Where was he at the time?"

"About three miles from here, on Beaver Creek."

The eyes of the man showed that the intelligence pleased him, and he touched his horse as if to ride forward ; but, as a new thought seemed to strike him, he reined in the animal until he rested almost on his haunches.

"You will be likely to meet this Indian again within a week?" he said.

"Perhaps," responded Will.

"In that event, will you take a message from me to him?"

"Let me hear your message."

"Will you bear it?"

"I make no promises. Say what your message is, and I will deliver it or not, as I choose."

"The man hesitated for a moment, and then said:

"It is this: 'Wait for the full moon.'"

"Explain the message, if it has any meaning."

"The meaning is nothing to you; all you have to do is to deliver it, and for your trouble here is pay."

He held out a bank-note, which Will pushed aside quite roughly.

"Keep your money, sir," he said; "I carry no messages I do not understand."

"You had better be careful; my patience is fast going. Once for all, will you take this message?"

"Once for all, I will not, without an explanation."

"You shall repent this," said the stranger. "Boy, can I depend on *you* to carry this message?"

"No, sir-ree!" said Dan. "I ain't that kind of a feller. If Will says *he* won't carry it, you may bet all your old boots Dan Williams won't."

"I'll make you sorry for this," said the man. "I'll make you repent it to your dying day. You don't know what is coming, curse you. You will know, some day, and then think of me."

Will rose from the stump and grasped the man by the collar. His companion attempted to draw a pistol, but found himself covered by the rifle of the boy, and being a prudent villain, he let the pistol alone, while his companion was pulled out of the saddle by the athletic surveyor.

"Look here, my fine fellow," said Will, "I'm not the

coolest man on the face of the earth. Far from it. So I wouldn't advise you to insult me. I won't hurt you this time. But, climb on your horse and go."

The man mounted again without a word; a tremor of rage shook his frame. His hawk eyes flashed fire, and he could hardly hold his bridle rein.

"Come on, Hub," he said, turning to his companion. "Waste no words. We shall meet this fellow again."

"An' when we do," said Hub, pushing his hand through his red hair, "I'll make a pepper-box of that young skunk. I'd do it now, but I ain't got time."

The two rode away together, never looking back, while Dan sat down on a stump and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheek, at the threats of the valiant "Hub."

CHAPTER II.

CORA DEAN.

THEY were still sitting there, talking of the strange meeting with the two men, when they were startled by the rapid beat of coming hoofs. Will sprung up and took his rifle, thinking that their late visitors had returned, when the green wall around them parted and a horse bounded in at full speed, bearing a woman on his back. A single glance showed Will that the rein was broken and dangling about the animal's breast out of reach of the rider, and that the beast was running away. All that was chivalric in the soul of the young man was roused at the sight, and he sprung forward, throwing down his rifle. His hat had fallen off, and his hair floated back from his forehead, browned by exposure to the sun. The rider, even in that moment of peril, found time to look her admiration. All passed like a flash. The young man grasped the head of the horse. The first rush of the frightened animal dragged Will from his feet, but he had firmly seized the broken bridle on each side of the animal's mouth, and it sustained him.

For twenty steps or more the beast kept on his headlong course. Then he began to falter. The strain upon his head and neck was terrible, and he stumbled. At that moment Dan reached his side and pulled the lady out of the saddle. This done, he seized the broken rein and bounded into the saddle.

"Let go, Will," he shouted. "I'll teach him to run away!"

Will, who had the utmost confidence in the skill of the wild boy, released his hold, and rolled out of the way, just as the maddened horse flew over him, making a vicious lunge as he passed. Dan now was in his element. Literally born on horseback, he knew all the tricks of horsetflesh. Even while at full speed, he managed to knot the broken rein, and was ready to "fight the battle out on that line."

The sudden rush of Will had somewhat disconcerted the beast, and his mystification was completed by finding Dan upon his back. He paused a moment, shaking his head from side to side, irresolute what course to take. But, the hand which held the rein pulled too hard, and the mad creature was compelled to change his method of contest. Dan was a little off his guard, when the horse fell as if a rifle-ball had struck him down. So sudden was the movement, that it was only by throwing himself backward, that the rider was able to avoid being thrown head-foremost upon the turf. The horse sprung up again, but, to his surprise, the boy still was on his back.

Dan, laughing gayly, tightened up the reins and looked back at his companion. He had risen from the turf and was standing by the side of the lady, watching the movements of his erratic young friend.

"It is a terrible horse," said the girl. "Your friend is very reckless."

"You may be right, miss," said Will; "and yet, I never saw the horse that could throw Dan Williams. I'll trust him anywhere."

The horse was trotting along at a slow pace, evidently meditating mischief. Dan knew this well and had his eyes open, so that he was in no wise discomposed when the heels of the animal suddenly flew into the air, standing nearly in a perpendicular line from the earth. Dan, leaning back until

his back lay against the flanks of the exasperated steed, calmly waited for him to assume a horizontal attitude again. He did so, only to stand upon his hind feet, pawing the air.

Dan sat like a centaur until the horse thought proper to get on his feet again. But the two spectators saw that the lad had taken a firm clutch on the bridle with his left hand, and was taking off his belt with the right. Before they had time to think what he intended to do, his blows were falling like rain upon the beast. In vain the horse plunged, kicked, and reared. The hand upon the rein was like steel, and the other pitiless as fate.

"Do not let him beat the poor creature so," said the girl, pleadingly. "I am fond of him."

"It is for the best," said Will. "No one understands a horse better than Dan."

So it appeared in the sequel. Before fifteen minutes had passed, Dan had the animal completely subdued to his will. He made him prance, gallop, stand still, and canter, and finally brought him to the place where the others stood. His face was flushed by the exercise. The horse was completely tamed.

"There, miss," he said. "If he runs away again, it's *my* treat. He has needed a lesson for a long time."

"I hope you are not injured," she said. "I was afraid on your account."

"No need of that, miss," he said, looking admiringly at her flushed face. "I understand a horse."

It was a face worthy of a second look—not very handsome, but bold and free. The skin was too brown for the ball-room, and the hands, though small and shapely, showed signs of labor. There was something in the quick glance of the girl's dark eye, which was enchanting. Her dress was that of a farmer's daughter, of some plain, dark stuff, fitted well to her form, which was symmetry itself. She wore a jaunty hat, with a drooping feather, and still carried in one hand a light riding-whip, with which she was striking off the heads of the grasses in an embarrassed manner.

"*You* are the one who has been in most danger," said Will. "In the hurry of the moment, I have been so impolite as to neglect asking if you are hurt."

"Not at all," gayly replied the girl; "but, there is no telling what might have happened, but for your prompt aid. I thank you for my father and myself; and if the time ever should come when Cora Dean or her father can be of any service to you, I hope you will not refuse to command us."

"I am amply repaid for any little service on my part by the consciousness of your safety; and I hope you will not think me churlish if I ask you not to thank me."

"I shall do it, nevertheless," she said. "Shall you be long in this section?"

"Some month or two. My business you can see plainly by my implements."

"A surveyor?"

"Yes. I am employed in seeing after the government land. This tract belongs to the United States, as you know. And they want to know just what is the quantity and character of the government possessions in this region."

"It will take you some time to make the survey, doubtless?" said Cora, in a questioning tone.

"Oh yes. Five weeks at least. I have another tract to see after when I finish this, and some work to do among the Sioux, who are very restive just now."

"I did not ask you from motives of curiosity. You have no place to stay while making your survey?"

"Have we not?" said Will, laughing. "Look about you, and you see our home! Who has a wider bed to lie on? Who sleeps on a couch so fragrant as this? Who has a canopy which shows a deeper blue?"

"Poetical," said Cora, "but rheumatic in its tendencies. My father's house is not more than four miles from this place. Indeed, his land is a portion of this very tract. I surmise you will be welcome to make it your home while doing your work here. I can speak for my father in this."

"Your offer is tempting," said Will. "The prospect of a month or two of masculine cookery is, I confess, not encouraging. What do you say, Dan?"

"Say? I don't think it needs a question. Your blue roofs are well enough in their way, but they let in the rain. Your soft bed is very well, but you get bugs in your ears and snakes in your hair. I vote we go to this house, if the

young lady is willing. I always feel better with a shingled roof overhead than a leaky thatch like this."

"You always look well to your comfort, Master Dan," replied Will. "In what direction does your home lie, miss?"

"My name is Cora Dean," she said. "Call me by it. My father is a Quaker. I hope you have nothing against the creed."

"My dear miss," said he, "it is another bond between us. My blood on my mother's side is the same, and I am as proud of it as of my father's, which dates back to the Mayflower. What is there in the Quaker's creed that they have not cause to be proud of? The religion whose foundation is: 'Malice toward none, with charity for all,' certainly should command our reverence."

"Thank you," she said. "Will you go with me now?"

"I think not," said Will; "I have much work to do and no time to spare. But, if you have any fears of your horse, I will be your escort."

"I fear him!" she retorted. "I was not afraid at the moment this young man pulled me out of the saddle. I was excited, I grant you, but nothing more."

"I can well believe it. Will you give us the direction by which to reach your home?"

She pointed to a solitary oak, standing on the crest of a distant hill. "You will ride to that tree," she said, "and go to the east by the beaten path. You will easily find the house. For the present, I must bid you good-by."

Will assisted her to the saddle, and she rode away, smiling back at them as she went. Dan made a gesture of triumphant admiration, not daring to speak until she was out of hearing. The moment he was sure of this, he opened fire:

"What do you think of *that*, now, old Compass? There ain't many such gal's as that in the country, I guess. If there is, I'll pick one out for you. *This* one is mine."

"Why, you impudent young rascal! Yours? I fancy how she would look if she heard you say that. But, let us get to work. I want to do as much as usual, and get to this house before sunset."

"So do I. I looked at the gal close, and I could see with half an eye that she is death on making corn-dodgers and

slapjacks. I can tell by the shape of a girl's fingers whether she is a good cook, and I'll go my bottom dollar on this one."

"Do you mean to tell me, you young savage, that all you care about her is to have her cook for you?"

"I didn't say so; but, that is my best holt. If she is a good cook, the rest is a secondary thing; not so important, so to speak. A good cook I that covers a multitude of sins. Now, I like to eat—I don't know anybody who likes it better—and what I ask of a girl first is, 'can you cook?' If she can't, I don't go a cent on her."

"If I did not know you, I should rap you over the head with the tripod," said Will. "You can't make me believe you are such a barbarian."

"Well, perhaps not, but I *am* a horse on good fodder. Shall I set a stake here?"

"Yes. I'll show you where the old government line was laid. The last surveyer told me all about it, and I have it down in my book. 'A small red oak, with a blaze on the trunk.' Do you see it?"

"There it is," said Dan, pointing to it. "What is the next order?"

"S. by E. to a stake, nine hundred yards," said Will.

They set to work in good earnest now, and while Dan dragged the chain, his companion set up the tripod and made the line. They reached the stake in about half an hour. It was planted by the side of a great tree, and on the other side there was a fall in the land, leaving a deep hollow. Not far beyond rolled "bottom." Into this Dan plunged, dragging his chain. He was scarcely out of sight of his companion behind the body of the tree, when Will heard him utter a cry of surprise, and ran to him. He found him bending over the body of a man extended on the ground, whose long wiry locks and copper-colored skin proclaimed him to be an Indian. He lay at full length, face downward on the sod. Will touched him with his foot, and ordered him to rise. He did not obey. He touched him again. Still he did not move. He became alarmed, and taking the Indian by the shoulder, turned him over on his face. As he did so, a stream of clot-
ted blood dripped slowly to the earth. They could see that he had been murdered, for there was a knife-wound in the

breast, and another in the shoulder. His neck had livid marks upon it, as if from clasping fingers. His eyes were wide open and staring at them.

"I know him," said Will.

"Who is he?" asked the boy.

"A Sioux," said Will. "Not one to be trusted—a loping, whisky-loving rascal, though the son of a chief. He used to make himself useful about the village, running errands, selling baskets, any thing for whisky. He was a guide too, and knew the by-roads and mountain-paths of Minnesota as well, if not better, than any other man. Who could have murdered him?"

"He fought for his life," said Dan, lifting the dead hand. "See, he has had hold of the knife, for his hands are cut in half a dozen places. And what is this? He has something clinched in his teeth."

Will bent forward to look, and saw that the poor fellow, in the desperate struggle, had seized the coat of his assailant in his teeth, and had borne a part of the garment to the earth with him. The surveyor succeeded in extricating the fragment, and saw that it had a button attached, of peculiar shape, showing a stag's head on the face. Will put the button in his pocket.

"I have known many a man hanged on slighter evidence than this. Remember, Dan, that you must look out for a coat with a stag's head on the buttons."

"I've got my eyes open," said Dan. "What shall we do with the carcass? It ought to be buried."

"We haven't got the tools to bury him now. I think it would be better to go to the house where we mean to stay, get a spade, and come out and dig him a grave. We can get help, perhaps."

"Perhaps some animal might happen along. I think the body ought to be covered."

They pulled down branches, picked up stakes, and covered the "cold clay" as well as circumstances permitted. When this was done, they found their horses, and leaving their implements where they had fallen, they rode off at full speed in the direction of the house. A short ride brought them to the oak tree, more than two miles away, from which they could

see the house in the valley below. Their horses were good ones, and they did not spare them as they dashed down the slope over the turf road. Over stumps and stones, deep furrows and ruts they went, side by side, and dashed into the barnyard of the farm. The house was a plain log structure, of ample size, with convenient outbuildings of the same material. A number of thrifty-looking cattle were in the yard, and in an inclosure near at hand, five or six colts, with erect heads, were staring at them. Will did not pause to look at these things, but rode straight to the door and rapped on it with his whip.

His summons was answered by Cora, who started back in some surprise at seeing them so soon; but she greeted them cordially and asked them in.

"We have pressing business," said Will. "In the river bottom we found the body of an Indian, who evidently has been murdered."

"Horrible. Who is it?" said Cora.

"Peter Kane; perhaps you knew him."

"Very well; he used to come here with his baskets for sale, and I have often sent him on errands to the village. A harmless, inoffensive man; I am shocked to hear that he has come to any harm. Father!"

A man in the prime of life, of benevolent aspect, came to the door.

"I did not get your name, sir," said she. "This is my father."

"My name is William Durston; I am a surveyor and Indian agent. This young man is Mr. Williams, my assistant. We need your advice and assistance, Mr. Dean. We have found a body which we wish to bury; marks of violence are upon it, which proves that the man has been murdered. We would like you to view it as a witness, and to assist in its burial."

"I will go with thee," said Mr. Dean. "Cora, ask John to saddle my horse at once. I shall find time on the way to thank these gentlemen for the service they have rendered thee."

"No thanks," said Will; "it is quite unnecessary."

"I hope thee hast considered my daughter's request that

thee shouldest make thy home here whilst thee works," said Mr. Dean. "It is a poor home, but such as it is, thee art very welcome."

"I am sure of it," replied Will; "and we will gladly avail ourselves of your offer if you will allow us to repay you."

"Thou shalt do as seems best for thee in that respect," said the Quaker; "nevertheless, I would not be repaid in money; will be pleasant to have thee here; we have few neighbors, and our evenings are dull. However, when thou leavest us, it shall be as pleaseth thee best."

"Thank you," said Will. "Then it is agreed. We will stay."

The horse of the Quaker was brought out by an Indian, who never raised his eyes to the faces of the new-comers. Will looked at him closely, but he had no remembrance of ever before having seen him; yet there was something in his face that reminded him of another face, which he could not call to mind.

"Thou shalt go with us, John," said the Quaker; "wilt thou have a horse?"

The Indian shook his head.

"John run," he said.

"We shall be too swift for you," said Will, kindly.

"No," said John; "run fast—run dibble fast."

"John," said the Quaker, "thou art wrong to use vain words."

"John sorry," said the Indian, with a ludicrous expression of humility; "John very sorry; not say dibble any more. No want horse."

Cora stood in the doorway and saw them depart. John ran by the side of the horses. At times, when the ground was level, the horses drew ahead, but the moment they came to a rise, he would be in advance again, pressing up the slope at a rate which put the horses to their speed to catch him; and though it was a good four miles to the place where the dead man lay, he hardly showed that he had run a hundred yards. He stopped a little way from the pile of brush which covered the body, with his head down in his usual dejected attitude, scarcely seeming to notice what they did. They uncovered

the man and were bending over him, when Will felt something brush his clothes. He looked up; the Indian, gliding like a specter, had come up, and was looking silently at the dead face.

"Do you know him?" said Dan.

"Brother!" said he; "John's brother! Who kill him?"

"I do not know, my poor fellow," said Will. "All we have is this button, which came from the coat of his murderer."

The Indian seized it quickly, and looked it over with eager eyes; then he hurriedly placed it in the folds of his clothing and would not give it up.

"Never mind," said Will. "We can remember how it looks."

They set to work, with the spades they had brought, and dug a shallow grave. The Indian sat down at the head of his dead brother, and never moved until they lifted the body to lay it in the grave, when he arrested their work:

"No put John's brother in there," he said. "John take him to Indian's burial-place, where fathers sleep, and Great Chief's spirit sometimes comes."

"But where is it, John boy," kindly asked the Quaker.

The Indian silently pointed to the east.

"Many seasons ago, when the moon was younger, and the forests were deeper, before the white men came, the red-men made a hill sacred to the Manitou, by much fasting and the sacrifice of many dogs. It was ever after to be their resting-place, after death; and from its top, at night, the dead departed to the happy hunting-ground. The place is sacred yet; the white man has spared it; thither John must bear the body. Leave it here, and when the moon comes up John will be on the river with his canoe."

Then, silently seating himself at the head of the dead, he bowed his face upon his knees, to keep the solemn dead watch until night. The three whites moved off, without uttering a word, and mounting their horses rode away.

"Indian yet," said Dan at length. "No missionary has drawn out of that red the old superstitions."

"And never will," responded the Quaker.

Keeping watch until darkness began to settle over the land,

John then arose and disappeared in the forest. In a half hour he returned in a canoe, which was moored in the river near at hand to receive its sad freight. Lifting the dead with extreme tenderness, the body was borne to this canoe, and laid prostrate in its bottom. Then the night-journey to the burial-place commenced. For hours the little bark glided down-stream, John using the oar with a silence which denoted awe as well as the usual Indian caution.

At length the hill, sacred to the dead of the red-man, was reached. Midnight was at hand. The stillness was as deep as if even mother earth was wrapped in sleep. Shoring the canoe, John lifted the dead again, and bore the body up the hill to its top—also carrying in his hands the paddle. Its use was soon made apparent, for, laying the corpse down on the greensward, the Indian plied the paddle so swiftly that in a half-hour's time a deep grave was scooped out of the soft, sandy soil. In this pit the body was placed in a sitting posture, and as rapidly covered as if fear of ghosts had nerved the arm to the work. Then John hastened to the canoe, and paddled off up-stream with such vigorous strokes that by dawn the weary and gloomy-browed savage was at the Quaker's home. Crawling into the barn-loft, John was seen no more that day—sleeping and fasting as was the custom of his tribe after the loss and burial of a relative.

CHAPTER III.

STOLEN HORSES.

THE quiet hospitality of Mr. Dean, the more openly expressed kindness of Cora, and the care of the servants attached to the house, made it very pleasant for the surveyor and his assistant. For some days their work was done in the same routine—the two men going out to the field every morning and riding back at nightfall. Their evenings were passed by the fire, reading and chatting. One night, as they sat by the fire, John came in, with an angry face.

"Some one come here, t'ief away horses," he said.

"I do not understand thee, John," said the Quaker. "Hath some one stolen our horses?"

"Yes, George," said the Indian, who had been taught to call men by their given names, "all hosses gone—t'ief away. Black Diamond, Redbird, Sampson, every hoss."

"That is bad," said the Quaker. "Some one hath committed a grievous sin; I can only pity him."

"Can you not do more than that?" said Will; "I think I can use other methods. Excuse me, Mr. Dean, but you take your wrongs too meekly."

"I have been taught to bear them so," said the Quaker, mildly.

"It is not the teaching of the west," said Will; "I assure you that there is nothing like the moral suasion of a halter. These horse-thieves understand that sort of argument best of all."

"You can not surely uphold the villainy of the so-called Regulators of Arkansas and Texas? Under the guise of redressing wrong, they commit crimes tenfold greater."

"I do not uphold them in their *villainy*, but for all that they are as necessary to a new country as the *law* in an old one. Where courts can be set up and offenders brought to justice, it is improper that such bands should exist, and Judge Lynch is a bad judge. But, where the laws can not be put in force, and where the strong hand of man is the only redress of wrong, Judge Lynch is far better than no judge."

"I know something about that," said Dan. "It isn't always safe to trust to the courts; and in 'Texas, mind you, it isn't possible to get a man's dues for crimes. I like justice; but no mercy to murderers and horse-thieves."

Proceeding to the horse-yard it was found to be vacant. The thieves had taken every hoof; they had not left the Quaker any thing to follow with. Luckily the horses of Will and Dan were safe in the stable, the door having been locked by the careful and suspicious Dan.

"It is a little hard," said the Quaker, his cheeks beginning to flush, as his temper got the better of his training. "I would wish no harm to any one, but these men will surely come to an evil end."

"They will come to a rope's end before long, or I am mistaken in my guess; the quicker the better," said Dan.

"Wish no man such evil, friend Daniel," said the Quaker; "it is wrong."

"I never knew such a man as you," said Dan; "if anybody cleared out my ranche in this way, I should swear—I know I should."

"Swear not at all, friend Daniel," said Mr. Dean.

"Well, I won't then," said Dan; "but if it was anybody else I'd swear a blue streak. They didn't get my horse; if they had I should have given them blue blazes, you may bet your money. Look, they had the impudence to tie their horses outside the fence; here are the tracks."

"True," said Will. "Where were you, John? I should think you would have seen or heard them."

"John been away," said the Indian; "when came back, all hoss gone; t'ief away, not one left," he said.

"Poor chance for a speculation in horse-flesh here," said Dan. "Look about and see if they have not dropped something which will serve as a clue."

John soon produced a lantern from the house, whereupon the ground was completely inspected. A button, exactly like the one found in the clinched teeth of the dead Indian, was picked up by Will.

"As I live," said he, "the same man who committed the murder has stolen the animals. John, bring out our horses, *quick!* I will run into the house and get our rifles."

Running into the house, Will confronted Cora.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"I want my rifle," he replied. "The thieves have got away with every horse we have, except mine and Dan's. We are going to ride after them."

"What is the use?" she said; "you will only ride into danger. The thieves are vicious men. You do not understand them as we do. It is not only that they steal horses, but they rob every one they can in other ways. You shall not go."

"I must," he replied. "It is my duty to root out these villains if I can. And I will do it."

"You must not try to measure strength with them," said she. "You do not know their power. Men of wealth and influence among us are members of the band. They have friends everywhere, though their enemies are many and powerful."

"But I must go. John has the horses out. Good-by until to-morrow."

"Shall you be gone all night?"

"Perhaps. I can not tell surely. I think so, however. You need not stay up for us."

"I can not rest while my friends are in danger. I will rather wait for you, or go with you. Why may I not?"

"You have but little of your father's Quaker spirit," he said, smiling. "But, once or twice to-night, he showed something of your ancient blood. But you can not, however, go with us. Your horse is stolen, as well as the rest."

"They were partial to you," she said, pouting; "but, if you must go, you must."

The horses soon were ready, and the moon slowly rising into view, gave them light on the way.

"They have left a broad trail," said Will. "What are you going to do, John?"

"John go too," said he. "Look. A button like the first! John look for his enemy; if he can find him, he kill him."

"Whew! That's the way the land lays, is it, old red-skin?" said Dan. "I pity the villain who gits into your paws."

"John spares not his brother's murderer!"

His black eyes glittered like those of the rattlesnake; and all knew that the Avenger was on the trail.

They rode away at a good pace, though not at their best speed. John kept by their side, running with apparent ease. On they went, over the prairie, by tangled thickets, by the side of stagnant pools, now riding on the bank of the river, and then leaving it out of sight behind the hills, always trusting to the infallible sight and sense of John to keep the trail. Trusty as a hound, he was never at fault in the slightest degree. Running with his eyes bent low on the ground, he picked out the well-known tracks of his stolen horses among the rest, muttering to himself from time to time as he noted some attempt to change the trail or to hide it.

After following the main road for some distance the trail abruptly changed its course and struck off in the direction of the river, some half a mile away. They followed it to the river-bank and there lost it. Just then the moon went down, and left them in darkness. It was impossible to follow further until morning, so they sat down upon the bank, after picketing their horses to wait for the dawn.

The Indian, drawing his blanket over his head, went apart from the rest and sunk down in the shadow, at the root of a great tree. Not a sound was heard, and at last the two whites fell asleep. An hour passed by and still the same silence. It might have been four o'clock in the morning, when they were aroused by the sudden rush of horses and a yell from John. Will started up, rifle in hand, just in time to hear the sullen plunge of a body in the river, followed immediately by another. The Indian was gone. Will rushed for his horse, and found him not! Only a broken bridle hung on the limb to which he had been tied. Dan's horse was not there! The bridles of both horses had been cut. Will, we are sorry to say, talked like a Hessian, and Dan was not behind him in hard words.

The morning was dark and nothing could be seen, but they could hear the splash of swimmers in the swift stream. Soon after came the beat of flying hoofs, and then a single swimmer came back. As he rose from the water, they saw that it was John.

"Who was it, John?" said Dan.

"Thief!" said John, indignantly. "John see 'im."

"You did, eh? What was he doing?"

"Him hid in rushes. Bimeby him get up an' cut horses loose. John jump at him and yell. He jump into water. Swim away."

"You couldn't catch him?"

"No. Hab hoss ober on udder side. Ride away very fast. John no catch him. Too bad. Go home now. Hoss all gone."

"Wait a while," said Will, "my horse won't run far, I'll be bound. If he stays about here, the other will stay with him. I have no fancy for running horse-thieves on foot."

In an hour it was light enough to return, and they took

the trail of the horses. After a walk of an hour they found them quietly feeding on the prairie. The animals were readily caught, the bridles were knotted, and the two mounted and rode back. They saw that it was useless to follow the old trail further, for on the other side of the river lay a great forest, with a thick growth of pine and spruce covering the sides of a series of high hills. In these hills there were hiding-places which they would not dare to penetrate alone, knowing, as they did, that many desperadoes lurked in the vicinity. Will was rather crestfallen at the result of the ride. John said nothing, although he looked grim and sad.

They found the inhabitants of the farm-house anxiously waiting their return—the Quaker, in spite of his peaceful blood, chafing because he could not go out with them. He did not care so much for the horses, but the Deans came from gallant stock, and had done good service in the war of the Revolution and of 1812. Cora was going about with a flushed, eager face, which brightened joyfully as they rode into the yard.

“We have not brought back your horses, Mr. Dean,” said Dan. “Came near losing our own. We must do something to bag these scoundrels. They burrow in the woods on the other side of the river, for the trail leads as straight for it as a line could be run. Oh, if we had thirty or forty men, I’d engage to give a good account of your horses.”

“I think thee would,” said he, looking admiringly at the eager face of the lad. “Thou hast an eager spirit. But, let them go. Why should I sorrow for a few horses? Their sin is great. I must not therefore sin also.”

“Your father ain’t like a Louisiana man,” said Dan. “They’d fight quicker for losing a good dog or a horse than for any thing else in the world. One thing is sure. If this chap loses many more buttons we shan’t have that to follow him by. It’s a peculiar button. I never saw one just like it. I’d know it anywhere; and when we ketch our hoss-thief, we’ve got a murderer too.”

“Does anybody know or suspect who is the director of this gang of bold villains?” said Will.

“Whoever he is, it is a second Morell,” said Cora. “He is known for his deeds everywhere. He takes delight ’n

daring works. I really should like to have a look at the bold rogue."

"I hope you will see him hung, some day," said Dan.

"Have any measures been taken to hunt down and break up this band, Mr. Dean?" inquired Will.

"No, William. I believe that, at one time, they contemplated starting a Regulator's company, but the project fell through."

"If it had not, you might have saved your horses. Who do you think would be likely to join me in an attempt to find out the secret haunts of these men?"

"You might try Stephen Pettengill. If anybody would join thee, he ought to be the man. He is bold and honest. Of all men who shed blood, I trust him most."

"Where can I find him?"

"He has a cabin about a mile away from this, on the road to the village. You can not miss it, for the house is made of slabs nailed to four oak trees as corners; and a great tree grows out of the middle of the house like a chimney. You must not laugh at Stephen's house. He is a just man."

"Thank you. I will ride down and see him after breakfast. I may well lose a day at this time, in so good a cause. Now, Miss Cora, as soon as you can I will do justice to your excellent cookery. I am sharp-set."

CHAPTER IV.

STEVE PETTENGILL.

THE moment the meal was finished Will rose and rode out toward the home of the hunter. A ride of about ten minutes brought him near to it, but before he reached it he was apprised of its vicinity by the cries of a boy and the sound of blows, accompanied by angry words. As he rounded a point in the bushes he came suddenly upon the persons making the hubbub. One of them was a genuine Hoosier—long, lank, white-haired, lantern-jawed, possessing a frame of great muscular strength. His jaws were moving upon the

relics of a monstrous quid of tobacco. Near at hand lay a squirrel, dead. A rifle leaned against a tree, and a boy about fifteen years of age, a living miniature of the man, was rolling on the ground, yelling at every stroke of the rod with which the Hoosier was thrashing him.

"Let up yeou!" he cried. "Let up I say. Dod rot it, enuff! That'll do. *Don't* lick me any more. Let up, do! I'll shoot better next time. Oh dear. Oh-h-h-h. Not any more. See yer, ole man, I ain't gwine to stand this. Yah-h-h! Oh-h-h. Thar. Let up, can't ye. Don't ye see the gentleman?"

The man stopped belaboring the lad and threw down the switch as Will rode up. His face relaxed into a grin of welcome.

"Mornin'—mornin', stranger. Whar mout ye be bound?"

"I am looking for the house of a man called Stephen Pettengill," said Will.

"Thar's the house," said the Hoosier, pointing to a cabin half hidden in the trees. "What mout ye want with the house of Steve Pettengill?"

"I have business with him," said Will.

"Then I'm the man," replied the Hoosier. "Ef ye'll wait a minnit, till I lick some of the deviltry out of this white-headed little cuss of mine, I'll be glad to hear what ye've got to say."

"Why do you whip the boy?" asked Will. "He must have been guilty of some serious offense to merit such a punishment."

"Stranger," said Steve, in a solemn tone. "Yer mighty right. That boy has done a thing to make any hunter strike his mother. Look yer. See this squirrel, don't ye?"

Will nodded assent, as Steve held up the little animal, which showed a bullet-mark behind the shoulder.

"Then ye know why I licked the little cuss. He killed that animile, hisself."

"Don't you permit him to shoot squirrels?"

"Cert'nly, stranger, cert'nly! Why not? But don't you see nothin' wrong in that?"

"I can't say that I do," said Will, in a deprecating tone. "What is the trouble?"

"Don't ye see that the bullet went in *behind* the shoulders?"

"Yes," said Will. "It looks to me like a good shot."

"I mout 'a known a feller from the States wouldn't know the difference. What use is a skin to a man when it's all tore to pieces that way? He orter shoot it in the head."

"That's so, by gravy," sobbed the boy. "I'll take keer next time."

"I judge ye'd better, my sweet youth," said Steve. "Come yer. Thar's a squirrel in the top of that tree. Shoot it."

The boy took up the rifle and loaded it, looking at the squirrel in ludicrous perplexity. He was sitting on a branch of a giant tree, holding a nut between his fore-paws, and nibbling at it, casting looks of triumph at his enemies below. Once in a while he uttered a shrill chatter. The rifle was loaded and the boy brought it to his shoulder.

"Take good aim this time, little 'un," said Steve.

"Bet yer life!" replied the boy.

As he said it the rifle cracked. The squirrel wavered for a moment on his perch, and then, spreading out his limbs, fell to the ground. Steve picked it up; the head was shot away.

"Now, don't you never sham stupid any more, Rugy," said he. "Cut yer stick. I want to tork to this gentleman."

The boy took up the two squirrels and moved slowly away. The moment he was gone Steve plunged his hand into a hollow log close at hand and drew out a small brown jug, corked with corn-cob. He winked prodigiously as he drew it from its hiding-place.

"Git down an' tie yer hoss, stranger," he said, clapping the jug under his arm. "Don't let the boy guess what we're at. The fust ceremony to be performed is to take a drink."

Will dismounted and threw the bridle over a limb. Steve handed him the jug. He raised it to his lips and tasted. A more potent draught he had never imbibed, for it was pure corn whisky, and it was with difficulty he suppressed a cough. After the first taste he took care that no more should pass his lips. He well knew that Steve would regard it as an insult if he refused to drink, so he went through all the motions of "taking a horn" of great length. This done, he handed the jug back, smacking his lips, as if highly pleased.

"I don't reckon ye very often git a better lick of whisky than that thar—eh?" said Steve.

"No," said Will. "It is very strong."

"Hev another pull afore I do."

"No, no," said Will. "Not at present."

"Here's to the end of your nose, then," said Steve, raising the jug in the air. There was no counterfeit in regard to his drink. The whisky gurgled musically as it passed down his capacious throat. He lowered it with a long-drawn—

"Ah-h! That's the right kind of stuff. Hev some more?"

"Not now," said Will. "Let's talk business."

"Jest ez you say," said Steve. "Look round the bush an' see if Rugby is watchin' us."

"I can not see him," said Will.

Steve ran to the log and slipped the jug in out of sight. "It's well the little cuss didn't see us," he said. "I wouldn't mind his takin' a taste now an' then, but the little white-head don't drink fair; he wastes and squirts it out of his mouth jest to see how mach he can spill."

"Is he your son?" asked Will.

"Yes he is, young man. I shud think any one cud tell that. He's a smart boy, too. He kin ride any hoss that ever was saddled. He'll lick any chap of his age in Minnesota; an' he takes to whisky like a hunter. Now, mout I ask what yer business is with me?"

"I am the surveyor who has been on the reservation for some days. Perhaps you have heard of me?"

"Wal, stranger, I hev. What then?"

"I am also connected with the Indian agency. I am stopping at Mr. Dean's."

"Powerful nice man is Mr. Dean. He's a Quaker, he is. He don't believe in fightin'. Now, he ain't like *me*, in that. I *likes* to fight. I think when a man is gittin' rusty for the want of a little muss he ain't to blame if he goes for it, *somehow*. It's easy to say to some chap thet likes a muss that he ain't so good a man as you air. Ef he's half a man, he'll take it up, an' that gives you a chance, so to speak. Bat, it's different with Mr. Dean. He don't think a man hev any right to fight. Queer, ain't it? Ain't a Quaker yourself, are you?"

"No," said Will. "Quite otherwise. But, I like Mr. Dean."

"You kain't help likin' the old man, somehow. So you stay thar? What do you think of the old man's darter?"

"A beautiful girl," said Will, warmly.

"That's the kind of tork! Thar ain't no such gal in Minnesota. Mind, I say it! Kain't she ride a hoss? Oh, I guess not!"

"It is this very question of horses that I have come about. The other night Mr. Dean's horse-corral was robbed. The villains did not leave him a single hoof."

"This riles me up bad," said Steve. "It's about time we had an end to this sort of thing. They are gettin' altogether *too* mean. Now, I don't mind it so much ef they steal a nice hoss or mule now and then; but when they clean out a corral that way and don't leave a man any thing, it's too darned mean. What kin we do about it?"

"I thought we might make up a company in this section and follow the villains to their haunts."

"Whar air they?"

"I know that their haunt is somewhere in the big woods. Myself and my friend followed them to the river last night. While we waited for morning on the bank of the river, one of the rascals cut our horses loose. They would have stolen them, I suppose, but Indian John got after the thieves so close that they had to swim the river. We had to give up the chase."

"Got any thing to go on?"

"Two buttons, with a stag's head cut on the top. This is one."

Will produced the button and handed it to the hunter. He looked at it carefully.

"Keep that safe," he said. "It may help us. I've know'n less things than that to put a man on a scent. Whar's the other one?"

Will told the story of the murdered Indian and the button they had found in his clinched teeth. Steve listened with the greatest interest.

"John will help us too. I'm glad *he's* on the track. I'll jine. You come hyar to-morrer an' I'll have some of th

boys on hand and we'll talk it over. I think I kin raise men enough about hyar to clear out all the hoss-thieves in Minnesota.

"Count me one, my young friend Dan two, and Indian John three—all ready to aid in the work of cleaning out the ragues."

"I think we kin raise twenty men," said Steve. "That orter be enough. Anyhow, we'll try it. Hef you seen any strangers sense the murder?"

"No; but I saw two on the same day; and now I think of it, they must have passed close to the body. It is a little odd that they did not see it. We had a quarrel with them, I remember, and parted in anger."

"Should you know them again?"

"Readily."

"Then keep a watch on them. Perhaps you may not meet again, but it's well to have a care. Take another drink."

He drew out the jug and handed it to Will, who went through the pantomime of drinking a second time, and gave the earthen vessel back to its owner. As he was drinking, his eye fell upon something in the bushes, which caused him to put down the jug somewhat more quickly than he would have done under ordinary circumstances. He thrust the whisky back in its hiding-place and took Will's arm.

"Come to the house," he said, in a loud voice. "I want to show you something."

Will, somewhat surprised, went with him. They walked toward the cabin; but, as soon as the hiding-place of the whisky was out of sight, he whispered in Will's ear:

"Foller me now, silent as a sarpint. I knew the little cuss would be after that."

Crawling forward without noise, they reached a place where a good view could be had of the log. It was with the utmost difficulty that Will refrained from laughing aloud at the sight which met his eyes. Rugby was seated on the ground, before the hollow in the log, holding the jug in his hand. It was evident that he had already taken a drink, and meditated a second attack upon the whisky. His features were expanded in a grin of supreme enjoyment.

"Here's luck to me," said he, lifting the bottle in the air.

"I'll skin him alive," whispered Steve. "He'll wish he never was born, the young skunk."

"Here's to the stranger," continued Rugy, taking another swallow; "'cause he told the old man not to lick me no more. I'll take a big drink for *that*!"

"That's an unnat'ral young beggar for you," whispered Steve. "Reach up overhead and cut off that sprig of hick'ry you kin see. I'll give it to him, hot and heavy, I'll bet."

Will did as directed, and passed the switch over to the hunter. Steve trimmed it carefully, keeping an eye on the motions of the boy, on whom the liquor was beginning to work. The grin grew broader, and his tongue began to double.

"Darn the old man, anyhow," he said. "He's been boss hyar too long. I'm going to take a turn at it myself. Let's see him try to boss me 'round ag'in. I'll show him what's what. Let's take a drink on *that*!"

It was his last drink that day. As he put the jug down he caught sight of the wrathful figure of the hunter, emerging from the bushes, waving his hickory in the air. Rugy uttered a single cry, and deliberately rising, threw the jug at his father's head, and ran for his life. If he had not been goaded to despair, he would not have done so desperate an act. Steve set after him at full speed, while Will, laughing with all his might, picked up the jug, corked it, and ran after Steve.

The race might have been a long one, for Rugy was fleet of foot, but, unfortunately, his foot caught and he fell to the ground. Before he could rise he was in the hands of his enemy.

"Lick away," said Rugy. "I kin stand it, I reckon."

"Hold on," said Steve. "Wait till this stranger comes. He seen you. He hearn you. A young reprobate that sez his father ain't goin' to boss him no more. It ain't that so much, but, when a boy goes and steals his father's whisky, the little he's got to keep out the cold, it's *awful*!"

"I s'pose I ain't got no cold to keep out, hey?" replied Rugy, indignantly. "Oh, no! any father as is a father wouldn't hide away every thing from his son."

"Yes, an' thar ye sot an' swilled that liquor down yer neck, like a barbarian hog. Yes, you did. An' that ain't all. 'Twan't enuff for you to say that you was gwine to be boss, an' to steal my whisky, but you must throw away what was left."

"Wha' made you come a-plungin' out of the bushes, then, scarin' a poor boy so?" demanded Rugsy. "Ain't that nothin' ? I think a boy that'll bear it is a good boy, I do."

"Here you be, mister," said Steve, as Will came out of the bushes. "I want you to look at that miserable critter an' tell me whether I didn't orter lick him out of his moccasins. Moral suasion ain't nothin' to him, it ain't. He'd jest ez li've steal ez not."

"'Tain't stealin' !" said Rugsy. "I ain't goin' to stand it. Ef my father is so hard-hearted as to hide every thing from me, I ain't to blame ef I find it and take some."

"I'll lick you a few, anyway," said Steve. "Oh, you young varmint. I'll tan yer jacket well. Hick'ry bark I'll tan you with. Mebbe you won't like it and mebbe you will. Anyway I'll risk it that you won't steal any more whisky."

With these words he fell upon him, and lashed him for as much as five minutes in spite of the protestations and prayers of the lad. Will laughed, in spite of himself, at the strange conglomeration of prayers and revilings issuing from the lips of both father and son. At length the boy jumped up and ran again, and this time was not followed.

"I guess I licked some of the whisky out of him *that* time," said Steve, chuckling. "Now, you go back to Dean's. Ef I don't come down to-night, you come up hyar to-morrow ab'ut ten. I'll be waitin'."

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW GUEST.

UPON entering the house the first person Will saw was his friend of the day on which he found the dead body of the Indian. He was sitting with his elbows on the table, conversing in an excited manner with Mr Dean, who sat not far away. As William came in he ceased talking and regarded him with a look in which hatred struggled with courtesy. The surveyor said nothing, and Dean introduced them.

"William," said he, "this is George Danforth. He is going to stay with me some weeks, until his business is done. Thee hast never met before."

"Once," said Will, quietly. "Shall that meeting be forgotten, Mr. Danforth?"

"As you choose," replied the other, with a look that the Quaker could not understand, knowing nothing of their former meeting. "I think the least said about it the better, as we are to remain under the same roof."

"I am willing," replied Will. "We spoke in hot blood on both sides. I am glad to let it drop."

"So be it. That youngster who was with you that day attempted to quarrel with me the moment I entered these premises. He is a forward lad."

"Dan is strong in his opinion. May I ask your business in this section?"

"I must beg to be excused from telling at present. My business is, to a certain extent, a secret. When I leave you, I shall be glad to tell you."

"Of course you will do as you please. My business you know already. I am also connected with the Indian agency. I was led to believe, from your questions on the day we met, that you were in some way connected with the Indians."

"I know some of the chiefs," said Danforth, in a hurried tone. "I have been a trader, you understand. That makes a difference. A man gets acquainted with many in that way."

"I also am familiar with quite a number of the tribes and with most traders in this region," said Will. "I never heard your name mentioned."

"Probably not," said Danforth. "Never mind that now. Mr. Dean tells me that he has suffered a loss in horses. Whom do you blame for it? The Indians?"

"No. It was the work of a meaner class—white men, who have lost all self-respect, and rob for the pleasure it gives them. The army needs horses now, and these fellows steal them to sell to the contractors. I am of the opinion that many of the contractors know they are stolen."

"You are hard on the contractors."

"The contractors are hard on the country," said Will. "The cormorants feed on her very life-blood, and their villainy sets others to work; but, enough of this. I mean to find out the secret of these thieves."

"I wouldn't meddle with them," said Danforth. "It is said they are very numerous."

"The greater the necessity for their extermination. The rogues will be handsome ornaments for the oak-trees. One of them is sure to hang for he has committed murder."

"Have you any clue to the murderer?"

Will was about to answer when he remembered what Steve had said in reference to the strangers. He concluded to say no more to this man until he knew him better.

"Nothing of any importance," said he. "We mean to find the clue. Where is Dan, Mr. Dean?"

"I think he is in the barn," replied the Quaker. "He seems not to be friendly with Friend George. It is strange, seeing that George hath done him no evil."

Will went out, and found Dan sitting on the horse-block, talking with John, who was seated on the ground at his feet, his grim old face full of earnest attention. Both looked up on hearing the footsteps of the surveyor.

"I'm glad you have come, Will," said Dan. "Have you seen that chap?"

"Yes."

"How do you like him?"

"Not at all."

"Don't you? Just like me. And John says he never seen

him around here before. Now the question arises, what is he sneaking around here for? That's what I want to know. He hasn't got any business he dares to name. He must be in a bad business, then."

"So I think. There is nothing for it but to watch him closely. John must be the man to do it. Do you understand John? We hope to find the man that killed your brother."

"Dat him, eh?" said John.

"No. Not at all, I think. But, he may know the man who did the deed. By watching him, it may lead to something else."

"John watch," said the Indian. "Crawl like snake in grass. White man *much* bad. When John find him, kill an' scalp."

"No; not that."

"Mus' do it. Why for not? Kill brudder; brudder kill him. All fair. John do it for certain, when him find. Good white man, you. John like 'im much. Bad white man kill Pete. John watch."

"Never let him go away in the night, unless you follow him. If he tries to do it, come to my window and rap three times. I will go with you, so that you need be in no danger. Will you remember this?"

"Iss; John 'member."

"Very good. I do not know why I suspect this man. It is enough that I *do* suspect him."

"How are we to act toward him?"

"Be friendly. It is the best way, in my opinion. But, tell him nothing of our plans."

"He's a smart one, mind you," said Dan. "Nobody's fool. You'll find that out before you have done with him."

"I am certain of it. We must, then, meet craft with craft. If this one man is a match for us all, aided by Steve Pettengill, we deserve to be ridden over by horse-thieves. You must come with me to-morrow, Dan. I have arranged a meeting with him and several of the inhabitants of this section, to discuss the means of rooting out this band."

"And we'll do it. Let that skunk in the house take care! I believe he is none too good to be one of them."

"Do not say any such thing if you can help it, Dan. I

would not have him hear you. Such a suspicion would put him on his guard, don't you see?"

"I'll take care," said Dan. "In the mean time, if ever a man was watched, he'll be that one."

They went into the house, where Danforth had remained. Cora, who had borrowed Dan's horse to ride to a neighbor's, came in, soon after, flushed by the exercise, and laughing at something Dan had said as he helped her to alight. Danforth stared at her like one in a dream until his look became a rudeness. Will's anger was rising, and he was about to resent it, when Danforth apologized, in courtly style.

"You will excuse me," he said. "I have been so long upon the border that a beautiful woman is a strange thing to me."

"Cora, this is George Danforth," said Mr. Dean. "He will stay with us some time; so thou must know him."

"He is welcome," said Cora. "Our doors always are open to travelers. Will, you have deserted me. I have been over to see Aggie Dempsey, and she has joined me in speaking against the falsehood of men. She says that Dan promised her that he would come over and see her to-day, and he crawls out on the sorry excuse that *I* had his horse! As if it were much for a young man to walk three miles to see his lady-love!"

"Aggie needn't talk," said Dan. "She ran away from me the last time I was there, to flirt with a red-headed chap that is hanging about there. I didn't see him. It's well for him I didn't, or I would have picked a hole in his coat."

Danforth listened quietly. "You are in danger, young man. A red-headed lover is notoriously the worst enemy in the world. Look out for yourself!"

"Never mind me," said Dan; "I'll take care of red-head when we meet. He'd better keep out of my way, that's all."

Aggie Dempsey was the daughter of a neighbor, a pretty little hoyden, to whom Dan had taken a great fancy. Since they had stopped at Dean's, hardly a night had passed when the three did not take a dash across the prairie in the moonlight to Mr. Dempsey's farm, where they were sure to find Aggie ready for a ride. And the four would then gallop off together, sometimes until the moon went down. It pained

Dan more than he would allow to hear that she was flirting with any one. To use his own words, "It was hard enough anyhow; but to be jilted for a red-head, was adding insult to injury."

In these pleasant rides, Will had not wasted his time, and an intimacy had sprung up between him and Cora, which was fast ripening into something akin to love. Neither of them, therefore, were especially pleased to have a third person break in on their pleasant companionship. Besides, that day Mr. Dean had purchased some horses of Mr. Dempsey, two for farming purposes and one for the use of Cora, and they had arranged a ride for that evening. The coming of Danforth might be a serious drawback to their pleasures.

"Have you got any thing for me to do, after dinner?" said Dan.

"No," replied Will, "I think not."

"Then I'll go over and get Cora's horse for her. Because, if we are going to have the gallop to-night, I want to try the horse beforehand. And if he is fractious I'll ride him and let her take mine."

"A good excuse," said Cora. "Well, I think you would do well to go, or Aggie will have time to think it over, and get *very* angry with you."

Dinner came soon after this, and Dan rode away. Danforth, with ill-suppressed chagrin, saw Cora and Will take a book and go out under the shade of a great tree to read, leaving him to talk with Friend Dean, who, though a man of sufficient erudition, was by no means as charming a companion as the one whom Will monopolized. Danforth answered at random the questions of the old man, and after enduring it for an hour, took horse and rode away, casting a look of anger at the two under the tree, who were bending over their book, utterly oblivious of his presence.

"Are you going?" said Cora, hearing the horse's hoofs. "You will be back to tea?"

"Yes," said Danforth, starting. "Good-day to you. I shall only be gone an hour or two."

He came back as he went, looking more angry as he saw that the young couple had not changed their position under the tree. He gave his horse to John and came out where they

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sat. Though neither was pleased at the interruption, they had too much genuine politeness to show it.

"An interesting book you have there," he said, glancing at the volume which they were reading. "You read slowly, too."

"One has to wait for the other," said Cora, blushing. "One is sure to get to the bottom of a page a little before the other. And then, when we find a very good thing it has to be read over aloud. It is a slow way to read, but I think we understand it better."

"I know we do," said Will. "At least I can speak for myself. I wonder if Dan and Aggie pass their afternoon as pleasantly?"

"I hope Dan's rival will not be there," replied Cora. "If he is, I am afraid trouble will follow. Dan is hot-headed, and brave as a lion. You did not see him, Mr. Danforth?"

"No. My way did not lead me near Dempsey's place."

"Then you know where it is," said Cora, in some surprise. "I thought you were a stranger here?"

"Did you not tell me the way this morning? No! Then I can't for my life tell you how I found it out. But, I did it, somehow. It don't matter. You have not told me the name of the book you are reading?"

"It is a novel by Reade, Charles Reade, I mean. 'Very Hard Cash.' Have you read it?"

"No. I have very little time for novel-reading."

"You ought to find time to read this. It is a fine work. When we have finished it you shall have it. Or you can read it when Will is away. I shall not read a word of it alone."

Danforth laughed and turned the conversation. As it flowed off upon general topics, the war, travel, Mason and Slidell, the Reciprocity Treaty or what not, he showed a fund of general information quite remarkable. Cora found him so entertaining, that their supper was late that night because she forgot about it until Nancy, the negro servant, called to her to know what they should have for tea. She sprung up with a laugh and ran into the house, just as Dan, leading his own horse and riding the one Friend Dean had purchased for Cora, rode into the open space before the house, accompanied by a black-eyed, merry-looking girl, with dark hair floating in the wind. This was Aggie Dempsey.

"Here we are again!" said Dan. "I've brought Cora's horse, and he's a beauty."

"And where is your rival?" asked Will.

"He! Let him show himself if he dare! I'll teach him how to dance."

"No you won't, Mister Daniel," said Aggie. "I only came with you to-day because he was away."

"You don't say," said Dan. "I almost doubt the evidence of my senses. All right. Let me see him once. I can't change the color of his hair by knocking him on the head; more's the pity! But, I can spoil his beauty. I'll do it, too."

"No more of that," said Will, laughing. "You look blood-thirsty enough. Did you come near Steve Pettengill's cabin?"

"Yes," said Dan.

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, and he sent a message to you. I'll tell you what it was by and by."

"Was that what you went into the woods for, and left me under the care of my friend Rugby?" said Aggie. "He told me all about it, the poor boy."

"What did he say?"

"'Thar they go, a-drinkin' up all that whisky!' " drawled Aggie, taking off the white-headed boy to perfection. "'Twict this yer week I've got licked, mostiy 'cause I took a suck at the jug 'thout askin' the old man.' How will that do, Will?"

"You are a born actress," said Will. "Go into the house and see Cora. She needs help in getting tea ready. Mr. Danforth, let me make you acquainted with Miss Aggie Dempsey?"

Aggie acknowledged his salutation, and went into the house. Excusing himself, Will led Dan aside and asked him what Steve's message was. It was a change of plan. Their meeting was to be that night instead of next day, in the woods behind Steve's house.

"We must keep it secret," said Will. "Where is John? I have not seen him for some hours. Ah, there he comes."

As he spoke John appeared in view, coming down the road

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from the oak-opening in which the body of his brother was found. It was his custom, every afternoon, to visit the place of the murder, as if it possessed some claims upon his attention. The grim face of the Indian lighted as he saw the two, and he stopped. Danforth walked away toward the house.

"You must not sleep to-night," said Will, addressing the Indian.

"John no sleep while *he* stays," replied the old man. "Watch him close."

"Be very watchful. Follow him if he tries to go away."

"Call you, eh?"

"No. I shall be gone after ten o'clock. Never lose sight of him after you see us go. Be sure of that."

"John knows," he replied. "No sleep. John has had visions. He has seen his brother like a cloud in the day. He calls to him out of the cloud. He says, 'Avenge me! I was murdered.' John hears his voice, and his wrath is awakened. He fears that he has been asleep in his revenge. The time is near."

There was something impressive in the grand sorrow expressed by the attitude and words of the Indian. They left him and went in to tea. He went to the barn and sat down by the open door, from which he could see the house. They called him to supper, but he did not move. When the merry party rode out upon the prairie, an hour after, he sat there still, looking at Danforth, who stood in the doorway, watching their departure.

CHAPTER VI.

AN INTRUDER.

THE party returned a little after ten o'clock, and retired at once. Neither Will nor Dan removed their clothes, but, lifting the sash softly, passed out into the moonlight, keeping away from the window of the room in which Danforth lay. John told them that the stranger had not stirred from the

house since they went away to ride. For John was on hand, lurking in the shadow of the trees, from which he could see both the door and window to Danforth's room. The sleepless energy of an Indian, determined on revenge, haunted him continually, and kept him on the alert. He sat there, muttering to himself, and looking at the button, which had never left his possession from the day he seized it by his brother's body. Their horses, waiting for them behind the barn, were led some distance from the house; then the men mounted and rode away. The moon was now up, and the distance to Steve's house not very great. A brisk ride brought them there.

The cabin was dark, and the windows and doors were closed. Will began to think they had mistaken the night, when a voice, which seemed to come from the earth, ejaculated:

"*Say, yeou!*"

"Who is there?" demanded Will, looking down at the speaker. He saw the boy Rugy, lying on his back in the moonlight, kicking his heels upon the greensward.

"Yeou're the chap that came hyar this mornin, ain't ye?" said Rugy.

"Yes," said Will, laughing. "Where is your father?"

"He's in the woods, he is," replied Rugy. "And what's more, he told me to stay hyar an' show you the way. I hope yeou don't expect me to dew it for nothin', 'cause ef yeou *dew*, yeou're ez much mistaken ez ef ye'd burnt yeour shirt, 'cause I ain't goin' to do nothin' of the kind."

"Did not your father order you to stay here and guide us?" said Will.

"Yes, he *did*, Mister Man. But that ain't got nothin' to do with it. He's in the woods, an' won't come out till he hears from yeou, ef it ain't till mornin'. Thar ain't no one but me to show the way, an' I won't do it, unlest yeou tempt me with a stamp. That's about the talk, I guess."

"You cold-blooded young villain," said Dan. "I'll get down and thrash you if you don't lead the way at once."

"Yeou will! Now yeou don't *say*! Skeered, ain't I? Villain, am I? Then we'll raise our price. I'd 'a gone before ef yeou hed given me ten cents. Now we want fifty,

and we won't take a cent less. What do yeou think of *that*, Johnny Sands? Oh, yeou can't scare nobody, *yeou* can't! Say, goin' to give us a fifty?"

"Yes," said Will, not wishing to lose time. "Lead the way."

But Rugby simply rose from the ground, and held out a dirty hand, with the palm upward. "Put it there," he said.

"What?" asked Will.

"The stamp!" replied the boy. "No trust here. Mebbe yeou seen what they've got in the bar down to Selkirk. A pieter of a dead dog, and it sez under it, 'Poor Trust is dead; bad Pay killed him.' Fork over."

Will, impatient at the delay, took out the required amount and gave it to the lad. He looked at it carefully, and then pinned it to the lining of his hunting-shirt, for he would not trust his ragged pockets. He told them to tie their horses in the woods and follow him. They obeyed, and the boy led them by a difficult path through the forest to a place where a creek, almost a river in size, went sweeping onward. A tree had been felled for a bridge, and over this they crept carefully, and found themselves on a little island, formed by two branches of the creek. This island was covered by a thick growth of trees, through which Rugby pushed on like one who knew his ground, until he came to an open place, where sat the object of their coming.

They saw a dozen men in the opening, of all ages, from the beardless boy of seventeen to the gray-haired man. All were determined fellows, ready of heart and hand, the right material from which to form a band of regulators.

They rose as the new-comers entered, and each man laid his hand upon his rifle. But at a signal from Steve they sat down again. Steve came forward, and shook hands cordially.

"Now, Steve Pettengill," said a gray haired man, with dark, piercing eyes; "you have called us to this rendezvous. What have you got to say?"

"I ain't goin' to do the talkin'," replied Steve. "This young man has that part. That's about the way the thing stands now, Jim Boyd."

"Speech, speech!" cried the men.

Will stepped forward, so as to bring himself more under the light of the torches, which were thrust into the branches here and there, set on poles and stuck into the ground, and swung by strings from the swaying boughs.

They cheered him loudly as they got a closer view of his fine face and figure. These rough men saw in him a leader, one who had a head to plan a campaign, and then to carry out his plan.

"I am a stranger here, my friends," said he, "and it seems hardly right that I should take the lead. I do not intend to do so, but simply to give you a plan by which you can rid yourselves of a scourge. Horse-thieves, I take it for granted by your presence to-night, are not favorites with you. It would be a pleasure to root out the miserable sharks, who first steal the horses from you, and then sell them to the government at an enormous price."

"I'd like to see them strung on trees with a knot under the left ear, if they made a line from here to Washington," said one of the men. "They stole four good horses from me, yesterday was a week ago."

"Precisely, and no doubt have robbed others here."

"Thar ain't a man among 'em," said Steve. "They ain't noways particular, darn 'em. They'll take a good cow jest about ez quick ez they will a hoss. Anyway, some one gobbled mine."

"I am glad that you all have a heart in the work," Will went on to say. "It is a hard task we have to perform. I follow them because they have robbed Friend Dean of his horses, and because, when we find the man who robbed him, we shall also find the one who murdered Indian Pete. The traces we have, go to show that the same man took a part in both these crimes. My duty to the government demands that I shall redress all grievances to the Indians, and you know as well as I that the tribes are angry at the many petty injuries heaped upon them by our men, who ought to know better. There is some power behind all this which is urging on the Sioux to begin a massacre of the unoffending whites, and, unless something is done, I fear it will culminate before a year has passed over our heads."

"I'm afraid on't," said Steve; "boys, you know I allus

said it. This youngster understands his business; hark to him."

"Go ahead," cried the listeners.

"In my opinion," Will said, "these horse-thieves are stirring up the Indians. They know that their profession thrives best in stirring times, and for this reason make friends of the Siouxs; they magnify every petty offense to the chiefs, speak of the greater wrongs we have done the Indians, years ago—God knows they were great enough—and in this way arouse in their savage hearts a desire for vengeance. Possibly you know that my business takes me a great deal among the Indians. When I saw Panther Slayer last he looked very grim, and I am seriously afraid that the affair will come to a head this year. Perhaps we may avert it. My idea is that if we can clear the country of the horse-thieves, and then induce our traders to deal more honestly with the Indians, all may yet go well.

"I have called you together for this purpose. Concerted action is what we require. As individuals, you have done what you could to run down these villains; but they are too many and cunning for that. They have spies even in your midst; some of your neighbors, perhaps, the men you least suspect, are members of the gang; you must have your eyes and ears always open. A band of regulators, such as I desire to form, must be secret as the grave in what they do or say. No man who is not a member must know who is; we must keep a guard upon our own tongues, while we let others wag as much as they will. No one must know our secrets; if he does, woe to him. Caution be our watchword; we will make rules for our guidance, and once made, let them be as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and whoever breaks these rules does so at his peril. I understand that all here are ready and willing to pledge themselves to secrecy."

"We will swear to it," they cried, with one voice.

"Such things as this, my friends, are made a necessity in backwoods life. There are few seasons in life and few places where men must make themselves judges, without the form followed in cities. Before we go on, is there any here who would desire to leave us, and hear no more of these proceedings?"

“If so, let him go now, and beware that curiosity does not prompt him to linger.”

Not a man spoke; their minds had been made up long before.

“It is better so,” said Will; “I am glad you are of one mind; if any of you were to go now it would leave a weak spot in our armor. Draw near, and I will repeat the oath which we ought all to take. Each one of you, in taking the oath, repeat your own name where I repeat mine; come close together.”

This was the oath:

“I, ——, do solemnly swear, in the presence of God and you, to be true to you, my brothers, in this business; to keep a guard of caution upon my tongue, that by no word of mine a person not of our band can obtain a knowledge of our secrets; to keep a guard upon my acts, that no sign shall give a clue to what we would conceal. If I fail in this, let my punishment be equal to my guilt. By knife, cord, or bullet let me die.”

The men, as with one voice, took the oath. Rugby had gone home as soon as he had guided Will and Dan to the spot.

“You all can see,” continued Will, “that some such oath is a necessity here. We should be nothing, if our members could at any time they chose turn traitor. You are bound to each other by a solemn tie; I can now tell my plans safely; before there was nothing to bind us. Our first business will be to elect officers. You will need a captain, and in case he should be called away, a lieutenant; a secretary will also be needed. I do not suppose our band will be needed long; but while we do act, let us act by rule. Elect a captain. I would suggest one; but, knowing nothing of any except Steve Petengill, I can not say who it should be.”

“I, for one,” said Steve, “think that no one but that thar youngster ought to lead us; anybody ken see that he knows what he’s talkin’ about with half an eye. What does you say, men?”

“Elect him,” shouted several voices at once.

“Listen to me, men,” said Will; “I thank you for the confidence you place in me, and, if you like, will be

lieutenant, but I think it only fair that one of you should be captain."

"Then let Steve Pettengill be captain and you lieutenant," said Jim Boyd. "What do you say to that, men?"

"Vote, vote," cried the men.

"Then, I'll put the question," said Boyd. "You that are in favor of Steve Pettengill for captain and the surveyor for lieutenant, stand on your feet."

Every man sprung up.

"That's something like it," said Boyd; "that job is done. Now, Steve, take hold."

"We want a secretary," said Will.

"What's he got to do?" said Boyd.

"He will have to write down what is done at our meetings, send notices to those whom we wish to warn out of the country—do all the business, in fact."

"I'm afraid none of us are equal to that," said Steve.

"Dan could do it," said Will, pointing to his companion.

And before Dan had time to expostulate, he was an officer in a vigilance committee. He took to the situation kindly, and producing a note-book, made a record of the proceedings. Steve had asked the further pleasure of the meeting, when a dark figure, gliding like a shadow, pushed its way into the midst of the regulators, holding up a warning finger. As he came into the circle of light, they saw that it was Indian John. Weapons were drawn quickly, for these rough men were ready to keep their oaths. But Will dashed in before the leveled weapons.

"Keep back, men; he must not be hurt. I ordered him to follow me here. Don't you know it was his brother who was killed?"

"So 'twas—so 'twas," said Boyd. "What's he here for?"

"Let me talk to him," said Dan. "You have made the old fellow angry among you. He will never say a word to any of you. Come with me, John."

The Indian drew his blanket closer about him and followed

the young man. They conversed in low tones for a moment and then came back together.

"What does he say?" said Will.

"Take Steve Pettengill and come with us," said Dan. "The rest of you remain where you are and keep talking, but don't say any thing important."

The men obeyed in some surprise, and Steve Pettengill followed the lead of the Indian. He went back the way he had come, but not toward the bridge.

"Whar you goin'?" whispered Steve. "Ef you go that way you must cross in the water."

"Mus' wade," replied John. "No talk; keep quiet."

Steve saw that something important was on hand, and hurried on, with a step as light as that of the savage. They waded the stream, at a place where the water was shallow, never rising above their boot-tops. Once on the other side, John followed the course of the stream down to the bridge. Here he paused and held up his hand for greater caution, and pointing to Will's boots, intimated that they must be taken off. Will obeyed, and Dan did the same. They crept over the fallen tree, and followed the stealthy steps of the Indian and Steve. When so near the opening that they could see some of the forms within, John again stopped and motioned to them to come close to him. They did so, and peeping through the bushes, saw a man lying on his face, in such a position that he had a full view of the proceedings in the opening. At a signal from John they broke through and seized him. As he looked up in surprise and terror they saw the face of George Danforth. He struggled desperately, for, having heard them take the oath, he knew the danger he ran by spying. But, they were too many for him, and he was pinioned firmly and led out into the open space. The men crowded about him, while John pointed at him in savage glee.

"Me catchee?" he shouted. "Me follow him. Climb out window; follow Will and Dan. Me follow him. Catchee him. S'pose we kill him now?"

"Not yet," said Will. "We must understand this first. Mr. Danforth, have you been listening to our proceedings?"

"Yes," said Danforth, promptly. "What of it? Are you a legal assembly?"

"Unhappy man, you least of all have the right to question the legality of the act. Your curiosity has ruined you. By our rules, you must die."

"You do not mean to murder me?" gasped Danforth, turning pale.

"We are the law of this section. We punish all offenders. There is but one path of safety open for you, and that is to become at once a member of the band, subscribe to our rules, take an oath, and be made a regulator."

"I will not join the band."

"As you will. But take warning. Your danger is very great. Unless you are one of us, you can not go away to tell what you have heard. All our plans would come to naught if you did."

"You dare not kill me," muttered Danforth, glancing stealthily from face to face in search of sympathy. Vain search. Every face was firm and full of dark intentions. There was a vein of sorrow in their looks, too, appalling to a man in his position.

"See here," he said, in a strained, unnatural voice. "You'd do well to let me go free. I've marked you, every man."

"Ay, ay," said Dick Sands, one of the party, who had been a sailor in his youth. "So we think. And the more reason why you should never see daylight ag'in. Don't make any brag of what you know. Don't threaten us, either. It won't pay you. What do you say, Steve? The man refuses to be one of our men."

"You have your choice of three things now," said Steve. "To die, as die you must, by knife, cord, or bullet. Ef I had a ch'ice to make, I'd say let me die like a man, with a bullet through the heart. But you kin take any of the three."

"You don't surely mean to carry this farce any further," said Danforth, forcing a laugh. "Surely not. A joke is a joke. You've had yours out, and now unbind my hands and let me go."

"Choose!" said Steve, sternly.

He glanced again from man to man. No hope there; not

a sign of yielding. Some had freed their rifles from the buckskin sheathes, and were looking at the locks. During his life George Danforth had seen much wickedness, had slain men, had been in desperate danger, but never any that appalled him like this.

"Have your way," he said, savagely. "Dictate the oath. I will take it."

In five minutes he was a member of the band.

CHAPTER VII.

HUB.

Two hours after they were out of the woods, and riding homeward through the deepening gloom. The moon had gone down, and Danforth's face was shaded. A hell of fierce passions was at work in his breast. He had been trapped as easily as a child by the man he hated, and forced to take an oath to be true to his interests, the breaking of which was death. Once or twice, as they rode along, he was tempted to draw a pistol and shoot him on the spot. But, he knew that Dan had a ready hand, and that in the darkness he might miss. He cursed the day he had come to Dean's, and wished all in a warmer climate than Minnesota.

Will broke the silence.

"You must not suppose that any hatred of your person induced us to act toward you as we did to-night. Our band was in its bud. What you knew would be death to our interests, if told outside. The very men we wished to keep it from would be put upon their guard, and our men would be in constant danger from their machinations."

"I understand," said Danforth, in a gloomy tone. "I brought it on myself."

"Look on the bright side of the matter. I entered it from a sense of duty to the State. You should have a like motive. You will when you think it over. It is necessary that these scoundrels should lose their power, and they shall."

A fierce light came into the eyes of George Danforth.

"Perhaps it is better as it is, and I shall have no cause to repent learning your secrets," he said.

"Why, so I say," said Will. "It's a necessity, made so by the depredations of these bloody-minded knaves, that all true men should be with us. You must not blame Indian John for the part he took. He acted under my orders."

"Why was he not sworn?"

"It was not thought necessary to our safety. John has a reason, as you doubtless heard me say, for being on our side—a reason stronger than any we can have—the murder of his brother, a runner, killed on the prairie, on the day I first met you. Perhaps you heard of it?"

"Yes. They knew it in the village. I remember. And John was his brother."

They reached the house. John, who had set out before them, stood waiting to receive their horses. "If looks could have blasted, those he received from Danforth would have withered him. They opened the windows noiselessly and went to rest. Wishing to show that they had slept well, all rose early and went down to the river for a bath. Coming back, refreshed, they found the girls up, and Aggie about to ride over to her house. Dan prevailed on her to stay to breakfast, promising to ride over with her afterward, which he did. As they came up to the door of Dempsey's farmhouse, they saw that great confusion was visible among the men, who were running to and fro, shouting and pointing. One of these men was Dick Sands, who nodded in a knowing manner as Dan rode up, and took him aside.

"Good-day, mate! They've been giving us a rouse, my boy," he said. "Every hoss gone! Let me show you."

Dan followed the speaker to the horse-corral. It was found that the fence had been let down and a single man had entered, secured the six horses on a line, as with horses bought for the United States service, and led them out together. Here, by the tracks, he seemed to have been joined by two other men on horseback. The soil about the corral was soft, and the footsteps of the single man were plainly visible. They were of remarkable size, and evidently were made by a heavy man.

"That's a good mark to follow," said Dan, pointing to this track. "There can't be more than half a dozen men in the country who have such an understanding as that. Just get me a measure, Dick. I've a notion to see how long that track really is."

Dick went into the house and brought out a common two-foot rule. Dan took the measure of the track, and found it to be just seventeen inches!

"That's no fool of a foot," said Dan, laughing. "Anybody can see in a minute that he means to let it grow until he can walk on the water. Look out for a man with a foot like a showman's trunk, and you have the thief! In the mean time, Dick, come here."

They whispered together for a moment, and then Dick took Dan's horse and rode away at full speed. Mr. Dempsey was in a great rage. Dan took him aside and told him he should have his horses back again, if it were possible, and whispered to him, as he had a right to do under the rules, that a band of regulators had been formed to follow murderers and horse-thieves even to their secret haunts.

"Will you take me in?" said Dempsey; "I will be a true member, and I am determined to be revenged on the villains who stole my horses."

"Go over to Steve Pettengill's with me to-night, and you shall not only be one of us, but join in the pursuit of the rascals; they are not far off, and none of the horses stolen lately have gone out of the State."

They were speaking together when a man rode into the inclosure, in whom Dan recognized "Hub," the man of fierce desires, whom he had met in the oak-opening. He came in with a free and easy swagger, but halted and looked disconcerted when he saw Dan.

"Ha! Who is that?" said Dan.

"That is Mr. Hubbel," said Dempsey. "He is stopping in the village—he comes out here pretty often."

"Does he?" said Dan, angrily. "He may be all right, but he has been seen in bad company, and he threatened me savagely when we met again. I wonder if he remembers his promise to make a pepper-box out of me next time we met?"

The hesitation of Hub was but momentary, and he came

forward again, putting on the same air of consequence with which he had approached.

Dan looked him over with a quizzical smile, which the other understood, for he returned it by an impudent stare. Hub knew that it was the same youth he had met in the oak-opening.

"So it is *you*, eh?" he said. "What are you doing here?"

"At present I am attending to my own business. I can't accuse you of doing the same, I'm afraid," said Dan.

"You want your comb cut, young one," said Hub, taking off his cap, and running his rough hand through his fiery hair, "and I'll be the man to cut it, if you don't look out."

"Don't you frighten a feller so," said Dan, in affected alarm; "please don't; and keep on your hat, do! The sight of those auburn tresses are enough to make a man wild."

"See here, young one; you want to get smashed, don't you? Now, dry up; I ain't going to hear another word. As sure as my name is—*what* it is, I'll kill you if you insult me."

But Dan evidently was bent on arousing Hub's anger, for he laughed in an aggravating way.

"What handsome men they have in Minnesota; some of them have hair the color of the rising sun; beautiful as carrots, and as sweet-scented as opodeldoc."

Hub tore open his coat, and thrust his hand into his breast-pocket for a pistol. As he did so, the eyes of Dan were riveted on something which the opening of the coat revealed.

He changed his tactics immediately.

"Pshaw, man," he said, laughing, "*can't* you take a joke? I meant nothing more."

"Lucky for you," growled Hub. "I'd have made a hole in your carcass in about half a second. Take care how you joke; I don't take to it kindly."

"Oh, never mind," said Dan; "all in fun, you know; I never meant to make you angry."

"Where is Aggie?" said Hub, turning to Mr. Dempsey, who had watched the altercation in some surprise.

"She is in the house," he replied.

Hub threw his bridle-rein over a post, and went in. Dan looked after him with a strange smile. He was eager now for the return of Dick.

He had seen something which had given him a clue!

"Keep that fellow here as long as you can," he said to Mr. Dempsey, after fifteen minutes passed and Dick did not appear; "don't let him leave; make some excuse—no matter what. There is a deeper reason for this request than you can imagine."

"What made you knuckle down to him so quick, my boy? You might have known that I would not let him use the pistol?"

"I wasn't afraid of him," replied Dan. "A quarrel might have driven him away. After what I saw, I don't want to lose my bird."

"What did you see?"

"I have no time to explain. Keep him here; I'm off."

He tightened his belt, and started on a run; but on second thought he turned back, and requested Dempsey to go into the house and ask Hub for the loan of his horse for half an hour.

"Ask for it as if for yourself," he said.

Mr. Dempsey did as directed, and Hub readily lent the horse. Dan, vaulting into the saddle, turned the animal's head toward Dean's.

"Hie away, old horse," he said; "it's lucky your master does not know your errand."

He was gone but little over an hour, and came back as he had gone, alone. He found Dick returned. Steve Pettengill was with him. Dan took them aside, and whispered to them for four or five minutes. The faces of the two men lighted up with pleasure.

"Shall we take him now?"

"I think it best," said Dan; "I've sent orders to the rest of the men through Will, and told him to keep a watch on Danforth. I didn't trust that man, and never shall. The men will meet at the old place, and there we shall take this bird. We ought to be enough to capture one man."

"We kin make a try at it" said Steve, grimly. "Ef I

can't take any red-headed son of a gun in Minnesota, I'll agree to climb a greased pole."

"I forgot to tell you that Dempsey wants to join us; he is in the barn, I see; let us go there; we can administer the oath to him while our red-headed friend is talking to Aggie."

"I shouldn't think you would stand that," said Steve.

"Not a moment, only I know that his time is short," replied Dan.

They went to the barn, and there Mr. Dempsey took the oath which made him a member of the band.

"Where is that red-head now?" said Steve; "we've got summat to say to him."

"What has he done?"

"You will know to-night; just now, it's best to keep it still. It's enough that we kin hang him."

"Is that so. I'll shoot the red-headed skunk. What business has he sneaking round here talking to my daughter? Take him, then, and the quicker the better; he is in the house."

"I'll go in first," said Dan. "When you see me stand up and hear me say *horseflesh*, come in and sit down. When I say *thieves*, grab him."

"All right, my son," said Dick. "Horseflesh and thieves; that's the cue."

Dan entered the house. Aggie's red-headed lover was sitting as near her as she would allow, practicing all his allurements to make her look on him with favor. She was just in the mood to be gracious to anybody, for had not Dan come with her from Dean's and then deserted her? And was it more than fair that she should punish him by looking kindly on the rough Cymon by her side?

"I haven't got the gift of gab much, miss," he said; "but what I say is true, and I'm a man that's had heaps of money in my time, and a good show for more."

"I am glad to hear it," said Aggie, plaiting her apron-strings; "and I don't care for fellows that talk *all* the time; I like to get in a word now and then myself."

"Then I'm the man for you; don't you see it?"

"No, I don't quite see it yet," replied Aggie, in a tone which left it to be understood that she *might* be induced to

see it at some future time. "I don't know you very well yet."

"Then you'll let me come and see you sometimes."

"Oh, I don't mind. Do you know what has become of Dan?"

"Who is Dan?" he said, with a cloudy brow.

"That young fellow who was with father when you came. Oh, you need not be jealous of him; I shall not speak to him if I can help it; he ran away from me just now, talking with father about horses. Here he comes now."

Dan entered, casting any thing but a loving look at his rival, who returned it by a defiant scowl. A moment's thought made Dan smile, and he drew a chair close to Aggie. She hitched away from him.

"What's the matter?" said Dan.

"Never mind," said Aggie; "but don't be so familiar, if you please."

Dan emitted a long whistle.

"I never thought you would be angry at *that*," he said. "I'll leave it to you, Mr. Hubbie."

"My name is not Hubbie," said the other. "Be a little careful."

"Oh, Hubbie will do for want of a better," said Dan. "I want to tell you. Mr. Dempsey has lost half a dozen fine horses; I've interested myself to find out who stole them and I abandoned Aggie to look at the trail. Now she gives me the cold shoulder for that."

Hub changed color at the mention of horses, under the sharp eyes of Dan. He did not seem to notice it, and went on quietly:

"I've made up my mind that nobody but a good judge of horseflesh has stolen these horses."

At the word the three men outside entered and took seats. Steve sat down near the front door, Mr. Dempsey near the open window, and Dick balanced his chair on the hind legs against the back door. Hub looked at the two strangers in some doubt. Dan had risen to his feet, and was looking at his rival in his quaint manner.

"Do not be alarmed," he said. "These are neighbors. They have made up their minds to catch thieves."

The moment he said this, he threw himself suddenly upon Hub, pinioning his arms to his sides. The rogue's struggles were short. Before he could free himself from the grasp of Dan, Steve and Dick had him in their clutches. Aggie shrieked aloud, taken by surprise as she was. Dan rose with a sullen look on his face, leaving the captive on the floor. In that brief moment they had tied him hand and foot.

"What has he done?" said Aggie. "Dan, do you mean to tell me—"

"No," replied Dan, shortly. "But you may as well bid the scoundrel good-by."

"Loose me, *you*," yelled Hub. "I'll be your death if you don't. What! I'm not the kind of a chap to be bitted like a boss. Loose your grip, loose your grip."

"You keep a civil tongue in your head," said Dick Sands. "It will be good for you. We know what we are doing."

"I'll make this a bloody day for some of you," hissed the fellow, foaming at the mouth, "the bloodiest day you ever knew. Aggie, say a word for me."

"I'll gag you if you call her by her name again," cried Dan, furiously. "Where can we put him, Dempsey?"

"The cellar is the best place," replied Dempsey. "One of us must stay near the door for a guard. If he comes out, shoot him."

They lifted and carried him to the cellar. As they closed the door in passing out, the sound seemed to him the knell of his doom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIAL.

THAT night the band assembled in the depths of the forest, to try a man for his life. It was not thought necessary to bring the prisoner there. It would have made trouble, and they thought him safe in the cellar, guarded, as he was, by the strong arms of Dick Sands. One by one the members of the band came in, and took their places. A solemn expression

rested on every face. These were not bad men; but knowing that the law could not do them justice; that its arms were not far-reaching enough to penetrate to the backwoods of Minnesota, they but made a virtue from a seeming necessity in assuming the prerogatives of a court.

They were gathered at last—Steve sitting as captain and judge, Will on his right hand and Dan on his left. The others were seated on the greensward in picturesque groups, variously armed, but nearly all carrying rifles. Guards were placed that no intruders might come upon them unawares; and they were ready for business.

"Where is George Danforth?" asked Steve.

"He is sick," replied Will. "When I left the house he had his head tied up in a handkerchief, and was lying on the bed."

"Does he know of this meeting?"

"I did not tell him," said Will. "This man we have taken was in his company when I saw them first, and I thought best not to let him know of the arrest and trial."

"I told him," said one of the men, who had come in last. "I rode past Dean's house to come here, and he was looking out of the window. I knew no reason why I should not tell him, and I did so."

"Too bad; too bad," said Steve. "I wish he didn't know it. Did you tell him what the pris'ner is?"

"Yes."

"Then let's hurry business. It won't take long to try the case. Boys, I think we've found out *one* of the boss-thieves who hev troubled us so long. Dan, we will hear from you; and, b'ar this in mind: whatever you say now is on oath. Tell nothin' but the truth, for the life of a man may depend on what you say."

"I shall tell the truth," said Dan, rising. "Boys, I never told you the clue we had to follow the man who stole Dean's horses. It is a button with a stag's head and horns on the top. I found it on the ground the night Dean's horses were gobbled. But we found one *before* that. You remember Pete, the runner, who was murdered in the oak-opening?"

"Yes, yes," cried the men.

"As I have told Steve, and as Will, Indian John, and

Mr. Dean know, he had a piece of cloth in his teeth, with a button on it. He had seized it in the death-struggle, and there we found it. The buttons are exactly alike. We have been looking ever since, hoping to find their match somewhere. To-day I found it."

"Where? where?"

"Keep cool, boys," he said, taking a bundle from behind the log on which he sat. 'Fair and aisy goes far in a day,' as Irish Tom used to say. Wait a bit."

He untied the bundle and laid out before them a blouse of dark cloth and a heavy pair of shoes.

"First to these," he said, "to prove that they were worn by the man who robbed Mr. Dempsey. I took the exact measure of the tracks left, and found them seventeen inches long by seven broad. A delicate track! In the heel there was a mark, forming a star. By measuring these shoes I hold in my hand you will see that this is exactly their size; and in the heels are heavy nails, arranged in the shape of a five pointed star."

He tossed the shoes and measure into the crowd, and the men soon satisfied themselves that the statement made was true.

"Mr. Dempsey will tell you that we took these shoes from the man called 'Hub,' now a prisoner in his cellar."

They cast an inquiring look at Dempsey.

"It is true," he said.

A murmur began to spread through the assembly.

"Now for the blouse," said Dan. "This morning I was at Mr. Dempsey's. While there, this man Hub came into the yard. I had a notion he was poaching on my preserves, and got up a quarrel with him. It was not the first spat we had. I got him so angry that he threw open his overcoat to get at a pistol. As he did so, I saw a row of buttons with a stag's head on the face."

A cry of surprise ran through the band. There seemed a providence in this revelation. No one doubted that, in the person of Hub, they had found the murderer of Pete the runner.

"This is all I have to say," said Dan. "We took him and put him in Dempsey's cellar. Dick Sands is his guard. It remains with you to say whether you will give him justice, or leave it to the courts. I have done."

He sat down and Steve rose slowly. "Here is a man," said he, "that hez crept into our homes like a snake, to rob an' murder. What do you say? Air he guilty or not? Hyar is the blouse, jest ez we took it from his body, and ef you will look at it you will see that two buttons are gone. We know whar they air gone. Guilty or not?"

"Guilty!" responded the men, as with one voice.

"And what do you say? Shall we wait for the courts to help us? Many a time in my memory, villains an' murderers hev gone scot-free, because we waited for the courts. I'd a cousin onct, a good boy, that worked for a man in one of the eastern counties. When his work was done he wanted his pay. Mind ye, the man was a relation of his. He cussed him for a lazy hound an' wouldn't pay him. He threatened him with the law and went home. Next day the man took his gun and come over. He had his son with him, an' they found Bill in the cabin with his little brother and sister. They set upon him thar an' pounded him to death with their guns. Thet's what they did; an' the law never tetched them; an' they air livin' in the next county, hoss-thieves an' murderers yit. Now I'm thinkin', ef ~~we~~ let him go, the courts'll do the same."

"He has murdered a man," responded the hearers. "Remember our rules."

"What do you say then?"

"Death!" was the stern response.

"When?"

"To-night."

"Then this is the sentence. Go out to the clearing and mount. We know whar to find him. We will take him ou of that, give him a little while to pray, ef he knows how an' then hang him. Call in the guards."

A whistle sounded and the three men on guard came in. A few low words from Steve told them what had been done. The band was quickly in motion, picking its way with wary steps over the dangerous path. Once more in the saddle, the men rode at a good speed until Dempsey's house was in view.

There they halted, and left their horses in the care of several of the men, while the rest went on to the cellar, which was dug in the side of the hill, behind the house. They

found the door locked. Mr. Dempsey having a key, they all entered, wondering where Dick could be. They dared not go into the house in search of him, for Aggie would know who had hung the horse-thief and murderer. They concluded at last to take the prisoner away and hang him, and then find out the reason of Dick's delinquency.

The prisoner was bound, as he had been left, and gagged. They lifted and carried him to the horses. The moon had gone down, and the night was very dark. The prisoner struggled and made unintelligible sounds, but they did not dare to remove the gag. His feet were unbound, and he was placed astride of a horse, which being done, his feet were again secured, and the regulators rode away to the woods, not a mile away.

Once there, they made ready for the execution. A rope having been brought, an active woodman climbed a tree and threw the cord over a strong limb. Many hands were ready to clutch it below. A noose was hastily formed and slipped over the head of the prisoner as he sat on his horse. Then they drew it so tight that he could not escape and cut the cords on his feet.

"Pull on it a little, jest to see ef it is a good rope," said Steve.

They drew away on the cord and lifted the man fairly out of his saddle by way of a test.

"Let him down, now," said Steve, "and bring a torch here. I want to question him. Dan, take out the gag."

A torch was brought, and Dan, engaged in untying the cord which held the gag in the prisoner's mouth, heard the captain utter a cry of surprise, and heard the others say, "Dick Sands!"

Looking at the prisoner's face, which he saw for the first time, now that the torch was lighted, he beheld, not Hub, but his guard, *Dick Sands!*

A hush fell upon the crowd, and they looked at their victim in confusion and dismay. Dan was the first to recover consciousness, and he tore the gag from the mouth of the quondam guard, and cut the cords upon his arms. But Dick still sat upon the horse with the noose about his neck, the picture of woe.

In order to explain the position of Dick it is necessary to go back to the time when George Danforth was informed of the capture of Hub. It is not the design of the story to hide the fact that these two were in league, and bound to aid each other. The sickness of Danforth had been assumed, to give him a chance to be alone with Cora. But the intelligence he received gave him other employment. The moment Will and Dan set out on their way to the secret rendezvous, he also left the house, got his horse out of the stable, and rode away, telling Cora that a ride would do his aching head good. When out of sight of the house he rode at once to Dempsey's. He found nobody in the house but Aggie, who was in bad humor with Dan for being angry with her; with Hub for being the cause of that anger; with her father for keeping secret the crime of Hub; with Dick for refusing to let her visit the prisoner; and with Danforth for coming when she was out of temper. He got very little information from her, but was enabled to discover, through her spiteful answers, that all the men in the neighborhood were having a *caucus* somewhere in the woods, and that they had left her all alone with a horse-thief. She had gathered enough from their conversation to suspect the crime of Hub, although not certain what it was.

"You are short to-night, Miss Aggie," said Danforth, showing his white teeth. "I always thought you admired Hub."

"Admire him! I thank you kindly for the compliment to my taste," said Aggie, making him a profound courtesy.

"To be sure, he is not the handsomest fellow in the world," replied Danforth. "But, what a heart he has got!"

"How came you to know him so well?" was the quick reply.

The answer disconcerted him. "Only from hearsay. I don't pretend to know him personally. Who is taking care of him?"

"Dick Sands."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Honest," replied the girl, turning her flashing eyes upon his face. "He will take care that the fellow does not get away."

"I hope so," said Danforth, "if he is guilty of the crime

they lay to his charge. I should like to see him. I think I will go out and speak to this Dick."

He went out. As he opened the door, he imagined that he saw a dark figure stealing away in the darkness. He called, and received no answer from that direction, though a rough voice from the direction of the cellar called out:

"Who's thar?"

Danforth recognized the voice of Dick Sands, and went toward him, until met by his leveled rifle.

"Halt thar!" he said, "till I know who you be."

"George Danforth," he replied. "How are you getting on?"

"Lonesome," said Dick. "I wish the boys would hurry up thar cakes and hang this feller. He deserven it, if ever a chap did. Why, don't ye think he is the same chap that stole Dean's hosses and killed the Indian runner? We know it by the buttons they found."

"Do they think he killed the Indian?" said the other, in a strange tone of voice. "Don't they suspect anybody else?"

"Why should they? The Injin had the button clinched in his teeth, and he deader'n a hammer. Smart chap, that Dan. He found it out as cunning as a fox. He got this chap here mad, and he opened his coat so that Dick could see the blouse. I call that pretty sharp."

"He is too sharp," replied Danforth. "At least I think so. They will hang this man for the murder of the Indian, you think?"

"Of course."

"Why of course? It's only an Indian more or less," replied Danforth, coolly.

"That sort of talk has made bad work among the Indians before now. You think their lives nothing, *they* don't, and when you kill one, and give no account of it, you may be kindling a fire it will take blood to quench."

"Will the trial go on in the village?"

"What? Ain't you heard?"

"They told me nothing."

"Then don't ask me any questions, 'cause, if the lieutenant wanted you to know he'd 'a told you himself. I guess you'd better go away."

"I'd like to see the man."

"Can't do it."

"Why not?"

"Ag'in' orders. Come, clear out. I haven't done right hearing you so long. I don't want you to stay another minnit."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night."

Danforth turned away, looking back over his shoulder. His hand was in the breast-pocket of his coat, on the hilt of a pistol. Upon second thought he did not use it, but took something in his hand, still casting that fox-like look at the guard. He had taken two steps toward the house, and Dick was completely off his guard, when the fellow turned with a bound like a tiger, and struck him down with the weapon in his hand, misnamed a "life-preserver." Dick fell like an ox. In a moment the key was taken from his person, and Hub set at liberty. After a minute's consultation they dragged the senseless body of Dick into the cellar, stripped off his clothing, put that of Hub on him, and gagged him securely. This done, the two villains went out, locked the door, and threw away the key. Neither of them saw the dark figure, not twenty feet away, prostrate on the ground, watching every movement with eager eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

ON TRAIL.

HUB began to show his colors now. The man's nature was bloody, and he delighted in deeds of violence. One of those tools of more acute minds, he committed murder for the love of it, and robbed and stole because it was a pastime. Many a time had his neck been in danger, and though he had despaired half an hour ago, "Richard was himself again;" "up to the Hub," he said, with a grim smile.

"Let's gut the house," he added.

"I don't think you will find any thing there which will pay you," said Danforth. "Let it go."

"No," said Hub, savagely. "I will not let it go. In that house I was dragged down and captured. In that house I will have my revenge. Don't you understand; the girl is there alone. I'll mistreat her, and leave my mark behind."

"I won't join you in any thing of that kind," said Danforth. "The girl is an excellent girl, as times go. She had nothing to do with your mistreatment, and must not be made suffer injury for others."

"Don't I know that the boy who was foremost in degrading me is in love with her, and is her accepted suitor. Insult to her, therefore, is to harm and madden him. So here goes for a case of assault and battery on seventeen years of female loveliness."

"There is no time for fooling, I tell you. They will make short work of the trial. Their proof is full. By this time they have convicted you of the murder of the Indian."

"To think that the cursed button should have betrayed me! I meant to throw away that blouse to-morrow. Curse it, I say."

"Curses will not aid you now."

"I know it. But, do as you will; aid me or not, as you choose, I am going through that house. If she stays in her room, and does not get in my way, all right. If she does, it would be better for her good looks and glossy hair if she had never been wooed and won by Dan Williams."

They approached the house with stealthy steps. There was a light in the front room, and peeping through the open window they could see Aggie sitting alone, in deep thought. Hub had, in his inconstant way, learned to admire her, and believed that a marriage with her might be a good thing in case he should be "unfortunate in business." Indeed, the main object of Danforth and his coadjutor in coming to this section, was to press their several suits—one to Cora, the other to her friend. The surpassing impudence of Hub had carried him considerably in advance of his superior; but, both had good hopes, until they found themselves eclipsed by the new-comers. Before this, they never had met the girls, except in the village, or on the prairie; but when the

surveyors became domesticated at Dean's, they saw that some other course must be taken. Danforth had succeeded badly, and Hub, although too obtuse to see it, much worse.

Hub laid his hand upon the latch and entered, with a pistol in his hand, followed by Danforth armed in the same manner. "Silence!" he said, hoarsely, as she was about to cry out. "No help is at hand. Sit down again."

The apparition of the man she thought securely bound in the cellar took her by surprise, and she dropped into the chair from which she had risen.

"I give you fair warning," he said, "that we wish to use you well. But if you cry out, or interfere with us in any way, you will bring down upon your head my vengeance."

Her eyes gleamed at the threat, but she did not move, while the two broke open the drawers of the bureau and appropriated several articles of value. But, her eyes were fixed on a rifle which stood in the corner, near the window. She moved her chair, so that her body hid it from view. Hub glanced at her as she moved, and went on with the search. He had laid his pistol on the top of the bureau in order to use both hands in rifling the drawers. Suddenly he heard her say:

"Move not, or you are a dead man."

He turned his eyes over his shoulder. She had seized the rifle and pointed it at his head. In the hands of most women he would have laughed at the sight; but, with Aggie it was different. She was a good shot. He had seen her bring down a turkey at a hundred yards.

He made a movement to take up his pistol, but the expression of her eye was so terrible that he thought better of it.

"You wouldn't shoot me?" he gasped.

"Perhaps not. I wouldn't advise you to tempt me. Put back all those articles you have stolen. No. Not in that pocket. Put down your hand or I shoot. You've got another pistol there. Take the things out of your coat pockets. I'll teach you."

Danforth looked on in silence. He had taken but little part in the affair up to this moment, for he thought Hub a match for a woman. Her attention was occupied by Hub, and she did not see that George had stolen a pace or two out

of range of the rifle until he made a sudden spring, which brought him close to her side. His hand was on the barrel of the weapon before she could draw back. The next moment it was wrenched from her and she was struggling in the grasp of the two men.

"Do you want me to kill you?" hissed Danforth, as cry after cry broke from her lips. "Silence I say. Keep still."

He put a knife to her throat and even touched her with the sharp point. She saw that crying out was of no avail, and ceased her useless struggle. Hub sat down in a chair at her side, holding her tightly by the wrist.

"Let me go," she gasped.

"Not yet, my lady. I've a thing or two to say to you presently, and you shall hear it. No more struggling. You have no idea what harm you may do yourself if you make me more angry than I am. You do not know me yet."

She looked at his face and the ferocious glance of his eyes made her tremble. Danforth had at last found a pocket-book, containing some five hundred dollars in bank-notes. He put it in his pocket with a light laugh.

"Money," he said. "Never saw the time when I had not a use for it. I think that is all, Hub."

"Thief?" said Aggie.

"Any thing else you would like to call us, my dear? Don't be bashful," said George.

"You call yourselves men, and yet break into a house in which you know there is no one but a weak girl and rob it. Oh, you are a couple of brave fellows!"

"Be careful!" said Danforth, beginning to get angry. "I do not wish to harm you, and so will leave before harm is done. Come Hub," and he moved toward the door.

"Not I. I have something to say to the girl before I leave. I want a lock of her hair and so forth. You ride on and wait for me at the three trees, close to the bank of the river. I shall be there almost as soon as you."

"Don't leave me, Mr. Danforth," plead Aggie, now thoroughly frightened. "I shall be alone; alone with him. I am afraid of him. I have threatened his life to-night, and what revenge he may seek, who can tell? Do not leave me. Protect me."

"He'll do you no more serious harm, I know, than to steal a lock or two of your pretty hair, and a kiss or two from your sweet lips." Saying which Danforth left the room.

Hub, still retaining his grasp, drew his knife from its sheathe, preparatory to severing a handful of her shining curls. She shrieked again, anger and fear struggling for the mastery.

"Be still, or I will murder you instead of robbing you of a curl or two," hissed the ruffian.

"Let me go," she shrieked, as she felt the hot breath of the ruffian on her cheek, and the iron grasp of his arm about her waist. "Father, save me. Dan, come to my aid!"

She felt herself sinking, when a fearful cry, such as neither of them had heard before, rung through the house. Hub relaxed his hold, when, eluding him by an agile bound, she sprung through the open door out into the darkness. In her terror, she did not know who or what had come to her aid. But the rogue and ruffian, looking through the window, had seen the face of Indian John glaring at him, full of hate.

They grappled at the door, but Hub did not dare to remain and fight it out. His sole aim now was to get to the stable, to find the only horse left there after the late theft, and escape. Being a skillful wrestler, he succeeded in throwing the Indian with heavy force upon the stone step before the door, completely driving the senses out of his body. Darting round the house he reached the stable. Finding a saddle and bridle he hastily placed them on the colt and mounted. As he dashed out of the yard John made a rush at him with a heavy club. He had recovered a moment too late. Hub eluded the blow and was off like the wind on the track of his friend. John ran into the house, picked up the rifle with which Aggie had threatened the thief, and taking a course which would bring him to the river in advance of Hub, disappeared from view.

Hub rode hard, and caught up with his companion before they had passed Dean's. They could see the old Quaker sitting by the fire, reading, while Cora, with another book, sat on a low stool in a corner of the fire-place, where the fire-light shone upon her hair, making it gleam like gold.

"Ha, Hub, are you there? How have you succeeded?"

"Poorly enough," said Hub. "Don't dally here. The devil is after me, in the shape of an Indian."

"Who?"

"I don't know him. A tall, savage fellow, rather old. Looks some like Pete."

"So he ought. He is Pete's brother."

"Come on then. Curse it, do you want him to catch me. I only got away by the skin of my teeth. Curse him. Why does he follow me?"

"Because you killed Pete."

"And am I to be haunted by this ghost of an Indian, because I killed his loping fool of a brother. He'd better not come within reach of my rifle. 'Twon't be safe for him. Why don't you ride on?"

"I was thinking I might never have a better chance to get the girl than now. Nobody there but the old man. If we could seize her, and take her to the retreat, I should have her safe."

"I won't do it to-night. Perhaps I shall feel better to-morrow, but the sight of that cursed Indian has given me such a turn as I never had before. I had her in my arms when he yelled. Such a yell! It seemed as if the fiends from the pit were making a holiday. It rings in my ears yet. I loosed my hold and she rushed from the room, making tracks, no doubt, in this direction. Hark!"

They heard the swift coming of footsteps in the darkness.

"That's her," said Hub. "She has got off the track somehow. Or maybe it's the Indian. Come along."

Danforth followed him reluctantly, and they turned their horses' heads across the prairie. Their course took them through the opening in which Pete was murdered. Hub started and reined his horse so that Danforth rode between him and the spot. Danforth noticed the action and laughed.

"I hope you have not turned womanish, old fellow. You remember this spot, I suppose."

"I can't help it. I'm not myself to-night, after seeing that Indian. I'm sorry I killed Pete. There was no need."

"I told you so, after it was done," said Danforth. "It need never have been known if you had staid and helped me bury the carcass. The surveyor found it."

"I wish it had been that boy, Dan," said Hub, setting his teeth hard. "I'll be at his burial yet, or I am a liar. If it had not been for him I should not have been found out at all. It serves us right for spending so much time fooling with these women. Hark! Didn't you hear something?"

"Nothing but the wind in the trees," said Danforth. "You are like a girl to-night. You heard nothing."

"Stop your horse," persisted Hub, "I am sure I heard a step."

They pulled up and listened. The only sound that came to their ears was the wind sighing in the tree-tops. Hub was satisfied, and they rode on. But, at every unusual sound, he halted and listened anxiously. These frequent halts nettled Danforth, who protested against the delay. At length they reached the river-side, and paused a moment.

"I remember the place well," said Hub. "It was in yonder clump of bushes I lay hidden next day after we stole Dean's horses. Those devils of surveyors sat down under yonder tree. I never thought of anybody else being with them. But, I had just cut the horses loose when some one made a jump at me. Do you know who it was?"

"The Indian."

"The same who chased me to-night?"

"Yes."

"He follows me like a shadow. I wish he lay in the grave, by his brother's side. I shall never feel safe until he does."

"Bah! I hope my old companion does not mean to go through life trembling on account of a superannuated Indian."

"He managed to nab you the time you joined the regulators," sneered Hub.

"I owe him *one* for that," said Danforth, "and I will be even one day. But, we must swim the river."

He dismounted, and was about to lead his horse into the water, when the surrounding darkness was suddenly illumined by the flash of a rifle. Hub, uttering a cry of rage and pain, fell from his saddle. But he was on his feet again in a moment, and in the bushes, pistol in hand. Danforth's first idea was to cover himself in the reeds, supposing that they were assailed by a party; but, hearing nothing but the furious curses of Hub, he turned back and found him stamping up

and down among the bushes. Danforth seized him by the shoulder and dragged him away.

"Come back, you fool," he said. "Do you mean to stay here until that devil loads his rifle again? Did you see him?"

"Yes. I saw his face by the flash of the rifle. It was the Indian!"

"Phew! The fellow means business. Are you badly hurt?"

"Hit in the shoulder. I can't swim."

"Your horse can. Come along."

They plunged into the water, Danforth with his arm over the saddle of his own horse, and the bridle of Hub's in his teeth, going in front. The darkness hid them from sight.

CHAPTER X.

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD

THEY passed the stream in this way, and went forward toward their secret haunt. But, wherever they went, they were followed by the dark figure of the Indian, who had sworn, in his secret heart, to be the death of the man who had killed his brother. They led him a fearful journey, through tangled swamps and morasses where the feet of man rarely trod. But nothing could turn aside the avenger. He saw nothing except the dark forms before him, heard nothing but the foot-falls of their horses. Hub was ill at ease, and the wound in his shoulder was painful. Yet not the wound troubled him most. The thought of the man who hung like a sleuth-hound on the trail gave him most pain.

"Do you think he is following yet?" he said, anxiously.

"Who—the Indian? Nonsense. He stopped at the river. He would not dare to follow us after we were sure he was on the trail."

"And yet see what he did. It is six miles by the road to this place, at least four by the nearest route, and he was here as soon as we. He is determined to have my blood."

"So it seems."

"If you had seen his face when he fired, as I did, you would fear him too. I never saw such a devilish look on a human face. If he is following us, he will find out the secret of the retreat."

"That must be looked after," said Danforth. "He had better not follow. If he does, his life is not worth an acorn. Stop. When we round yonder bush let us hide and see if he is following."

They did so. In five minutes they heard a stealthy footfall, which ceased as soon as it came in sight of the bush. They waited some time, but in vain. If it was Indian John who followed them, he was too cunning to approach a trap like that, until sure it was empty. Danforth began to think they must be mistaken, and that no one was on the trail after all. They went on, but the moment they did so the quick ears of Hub made certain that the enemy was again on the trail.

"He is after me again," said the ruffian, hoarsely. "Why need he hate me so? I haven't done any worse than you. It was as bad to stand by and see it done as to do it."

He was thoroughly cowed now. There was something in the cold malignity of the pursuit that was appalling. His cheeks grew pale and his knees trembled. Danforth laughed at his fears and kept on over the perilous road. Soon lights began to twinkle like stars in the darkness; it was plain they were approaching a camp. The fears of Hub seemed to leave him at the sight and he gave a shrill whistle, intended as a signal. It was answered in the same manner, and shortly after, dark figures began to start up on all sides.

"Men who ride have a word as a pass," cried a stern voice.

"A good word for a watcher's ear," replied Danforth. "Caution rules the hour."

This answer was a pass to the camp; the dark forms disappeared and the fugitives passed on. As they came nearer the camp, a confused sound, the champing of bits, the stamp of many hoofs and low neighing, told that they were coming to a place where many horses were corraled. They came out of the woods at last, and entered an opening, very much like the one where they had met the surveyors, differing only

in size. Within this, at least two hundred horses, picked animals at that, were feeding, each kept within bound by a long lariat, fastened to a stake driven into the ground, giving each horse a wide circle in which to feed. Some of the more spirited of the beasts were hobbled, and all were securely tied. On a little higher ground three men were seated about a small fire smoking and talking. Pitch-pine torches were thrust into every available space. The men started up on the approach of Danforth, with an appearance of deference which showed him to be a man of authority among them.

"Good-evening, captain," said one of them. "What news?"

"News enough, Boynton. They are taking pattern after our enemies in the southern and western States, and are raising a band of regulators. Too late to do any good, I fancy. Before they can harm us we shall have our horses on the way down the river, to furnish the cavalry of Uncle Sam, and pocket the dollars. They ought to thank us, when we are working so hard for the country."

The men laughed. They regarded it as a good joke.

"Yes, we think a great deal of the country," said the man called Boynton. "But, sit you down and tell us what has happened."

A few words will explain the business of these men. Before the war, they were horse-thieves and desperadoes. Now, they were nothing less, but rather stole in greater quantities, trusting to find, in the noble host of contractors who flocked to the pillage of the government, during the war, men who would buy these stolen animals, as readily as if they were honestly obtained.

Nor were they disappointed. These contractors loved the cause in which they labored, that of money getting, too well to suffer themselves to halt at so small a fence as a stolen horse, and no questions were asked as to the place from which the animals came, so that the price suited.

Indeed, as the stolen article was, as a general thing, sold more cheaply than the horse of just ownership, it is known that the society of thieves was somewhat preferred by the agents of the contractors.

A few words from Danforth satisfied the men that they were in hot quarters. It was nothing new. Most of them had taken their chances of a swinging limb and a short shrift. But, they were eager to get away. Regulator was not a pleasant word in their ears. Boynton especially disliked meeting Steve Pettengill, whom he had been unfortunate enough to see upon one occasion, not long before, when only the extraordinary length of limb possessed by the animal he bestrode saved him from death.

"We have got nearly all the good horses in the vicinity, except those belonging to our friends," said Danforth; "and it would be poor policy to steal them—'convey, the wise it call.' However that may be we can not go until the end of the week. I have some business here that *must* be seen to, and I expect McPherson, the Scotch contractor, to pay us a visit in a day or two. Until he does we must keep the horses here. By the way, have you seen any thing of the Indians?"

"Yes," said Boynton. "I saw Panther Slayer yesterday, and told him that the surveyors had killed Pete and buried him in the big opening. They are going down there to-morrow, and if they find the body, woe to the whites."

"They won't find the body there, for I hear that Indian John bore it away down-stream for burial in the old place of graves on Spirit Hill. But, telling Panther Slayer that the surveyors killed the red is a good idea; it will add to his anger even now ready to break forth in war. The only fear is that the chief will see Indian John and learn the truth from him. In that case we should have no help from the reds in running off our stock, but might, indeed, have them down on us in spite of the whisky and powder we already have presented the dogs. Do you see the love-mark John has given Hub as a token of his admiration? Look to his shoulder, Boynton. You are all the surgeon we have."

Hub lared his back, and Boynton, by the aid of a sharp bowie-knife, succeeded in extracting the ball, which had lodged in the muscles just above the shoulder-blade. It was rough treatment, but Hub bore it bravely, until the wound was bandaged, when he broke out into a storm of curses on the rough handling he had received from his comrade.

"That's a present from old John, is it?" said Boynton,

who knew everybody in that section, and for that cause kept out of sight. "We must look out for him. The old chap is a born scout, and will kill you some of those times."

"He followed us to the river to-night," said Hub. "There is where I got this ball."

"I wonder he left you there," said Boynton, musingly. "It isn't like the old man. He generally follows game to its hole. Maybe he thought he'd finished you."

"Hub made noise enough to wake the dead," said Danforth. "He couldn't have thought that; and besides, Hub swears he never left us. I thought I heard him once myself. We tried to trap him, but he wouldn't come into it."

"Catch a weasel asleep," exclaimed Boynton. "The old man has tramped the woods too much for either of you. Captain George, you are a good man for our business, but, as to scouting, you are away behind the times."

"No doubt; no doubt," said Danforth. "But, some one is passing the guards. Now I pray heaven it is my sturdy Scot of Scots, and that he has come to bargain for the horses. The sooner they are off my hands the better it will please me. I have no fancy for having the regulators come down on us, and gobble all our season's work. Run down there, Boynton, and see who it is."

Boynton rose and hurried away. They heard voices down the woods, and shortly after Boynton returned, accompanied by a man in whom, at a glance, one could see the Scotch blood, sandy-haired, lantern-jawed, long-limbed, but with a general look about him which showed he was not averse to turning now and then an honest penny, or even a *dishonest* one. "Hoot, mon," he said to Boynton as they came up. "Dinna fash yoursel'. It's no canny. Who told ye that a savage was in the woods?"

"The captain saw him," said Boynton, quickly. "And it's a wonder he did not pop you over. Here's your man, Cap."

"Welcome, Sandy," said the captain. "Take a seat. I am glad to see you. What in the name of wonder brought you here in the night? It is dangerous."

"Weel, weel," said Sandy. "A mon my think to be safe one way, and rin intil danger in anither. It's no kittle to

be goin' through the country noo, an' I couldna be fashed. It's no canny. I thought the Indians were quiet."

"So they are. But a certain Indian has a particular reason for hating some of us here, and our friends, by the same token. But, have you come prepared to buy some horses?"

"Ane or twa, perhaps," said Sandy, with a cunning look. "It's no' a large matter of money I can find no'-a-days. It's no' so easy."

"Never mind the tricks of the trade," said Danforth. "We really haven't the time, Sandy. I know your pockets are aching with greenbacks, and that you want every horse we have; and I give you my word, that I never sold you such a lot as I have here."

"Ay, ay, mon. That's a trick of the trade, too. I'll e'en look at them mysel'. It's onco little need we have for horses noo. I came oot more to see ye all than to buy horses."

"Nonsense, Sandy McPherson! Don't waste your time in that way, old man. I tell you that you never saw such beauties, nor wanted such horses worse."

"Weel, weel, if they turn out to be such good ones as ye say, I may take a few. I suppose the good chiefs hereabouts have lost some horses lately."

"Ah, no more of that, man, an' thou lovest me," said Danforth. "Where we got them, makes no difference to you, so long as they are good horses. Even you will allow that."

"It's no' easy to get good horses now, ye ken," said Sandy, dogmatically. "I'm no' so sure that it's safe to take them. I've heard say that a good mony of the men in this section are out in arms. Ye've made clean work with the horses, I ken."

"Say no more of that," said Danforth. "Hub, I think it is getting light. When morning comes, we shall be able to see the animals. Go down to the edge of the woods and see if the coast is clear."

Hub rose, and went down to the place where the guards were posted. The rest sat conversing at the fire when they heard the crack of a rifle and a shout from the guards. Two more shots followed, and the men at the fire ran hastily down to the spot. They found Hub supported in the arms of two

men, with the blood dropping from a wound in his other shoulder. The men said that, as the shot came from the bushes, they had caught a glimpse of the face of an Indian, savage and triumphant, glaring at them, and had fired two shots at him and dashed into the bushes. When they arrived, they found nobody there. The Indian had vanished. None of them knew him, but Hub, groaning from the pain of the wound, asserted that he too had seen the face, and knew it to be that of Indian John.

"He follows you close," said Danforth. "He must be a bad shot."

"Not he," said Hub. "He is one of the best shots on the border. He does it to torture me. I feel it."

"He had better make an end of you now he has the chance," said Danforth.

"He will, if I stay here," said Hub, gloomily. "Boynton, see what you make of this wound. This is the second operation you have gone through with to-night. I don't like the idea of being the subject too often."

Boynton's bowie was ready. He found that the ball, after passing through the fleshy part of the shoulder, had lodged in the tendons at the back. After much pain, the bullet was extracted, and the shoulder bound up. No one thought of following John. His fleetness of foot was a proverb through that region, and there was not a man among them who would have stood any chance of overtaking him, even on horseback, in the tangled woods. As the bullet lay in Boynton's palm, they heard, far off, a shriek of savage laughter, which they knew came from the throat of the Indian, speeding back on the trail. Sandy McPherson looked on with livid lips, for the canny Scot did not like danger, though fond of money.

"He's an unco fearfu' lad," said he. "Ye dinna think he's like to come agen the night, eh?"

"I hope you are not afraid of him," said Danforth.

"Eh, sirs!" said Sandy. "It's no' to say I'm afraid, ye ken, but I dinna like sic fashions as these; it's agen law and order."

"That's so. Hub thinks so, anyhow. But, it's little we fear the law you speak of, here. It is the sharp retribution of Judge Lynch I fear. The halter, the swinging limb, and

the good-by of one's own neighbors ringing in the ear. That is what we fear; and, mind, if we swing, every man here will swear that you are one of the band."

"Eh, sirs, eh? Wadna any mon think now, after all the money I've paid to ye, and the like of ye, thot ye'd have more bowels than to swear away the life of an honest mon?"

"Look here, Sandy," said Danforth. "To be sure you are one of Uncle Sam's contractors. We agree to that. But, you know the kind of horses we have for sale, and that they never cost us much. You came to us because you could buy these horses for half their real value, and sell them to the United States for double the same. You are in the same box with us—a receiver and vendor of stolen goods."

"Hoot awa', mon!" said Sandy, in manifest dismay. "It's no' fair to talk thot gate. A heap o' siller ye've made frae me ance an' ag'in, and now ye'd fash me by siccan talk as thot. Hoot awa'!"

"What I've said I'll stand by," said Danforth. "If we are gobbled, you must take your chance with the rest."

"But it's no' sic a heap o' siller I've made frae ye, laddie," said Sandy. "A wee bit. I've nae the giftie to mak' siller weel, ye ken. It gangs awa' frae me before I have it weel in hand. The government is no' so good pay, neither."

"Good enough for me," cried Danforth. "But come. It is light enough to look at the horses. See, the gray morning shows itself along the eastern sky."

"I dinna ken if I want any horses," said Sandy. "I think I'll be on my way now. It's no' so easy I am in my mind. Bring the horses to the town, and sell them like honest men. I'll no' be buying them of you now."

"Just as you please," said Danforth. "Only if you don't spend your money on horses, I don't think you will ever spend it on any thing else."

"Would ye rob me, ye loon?"

"Rob you? No! I rob no man. But I tell you what I think, and that is that your best plan is to pay us a round sum for our horses."

"I'll buy nae."

"We don't force you to do it, of course. Catch hold of him, Boynton."

"Hold your hauds, I say, hold your hauds. Let me see the horses."

They led him to the corral. His mouth watered as he saw the fine animals displayed there. He itched to add them to the cavalcade already in his pens at the down-the-river depot. But he began to see that it was dangerous to take them through the country in its present excited state, and he wished to back out of it as gracefully as possible, and leave to the horse-thieves the trouble and danger of bringing down the horses to the city, where he would buy them, of course.

"How do you like them?" asked Danforth.

"Aweel, aweel," said Sandy, "it's no' me that would be sayin' they're not gude beasties. Some o' them will do weel, others not so weel. But they're a braw lot, a braw lot. I'd be weel satisfied wi' them if I had them in the city, but ye ken I no' can go through the countrys wi' these braw beasties, lest your friends come at me wi' their halters."

"That is for you to determine," said Danforth. "If I sell them to you here, you can get them to the city in your own way. But, some of the men will help you, if you pay them."

"Ye're a braw callant, I'll say that for ye," said Sandy. "But, ye ken weel I never buy a horse here."

"Is that your decision?" asked Danforth.

"Ay, lad."

"I'm always sorry to ask a man to break his resolves," said the other, in mock sorrow. "But, what must be, must. I can't help it, as I can see. It won't pay us to go through the whole drove and dicker for every beast. What will you give, take them as they stand?"

"Not a penny."

"Don't be sure of that! I have here just one hundred horses. They are good ones, the pick of western Minnesota. You can sell them to the government for two hundred dollars apiece. But I want you to make a good profit. Pay me for the lot ten thousand dollars. That will give us one hundred apiece for them, and leave you a good profit. Some of them are horses you can sell to officers at fancy prices. One there is worth six hundred."

"It's just a fancy price ye'll be after asking yourself, lad," chuckled Sandy. "I'll no' buy a horse."

"Take him, Boynton!" shouted Danforth. "I'll teach the old Jew to dally with me. He has had chances enough."

McPherson found himself in the muscular grasp of Boynton, and the next moment his arms were pinioned at the elbows, and a lariat knotted at his knees. Helpless as he was he fell to the ground, and the robbers, for they were no better, turned his pockets inside out at once upon the greenward. They found a large amount in hundred and five dollar notes, which the unfortunate speculator had brought with him for the purchase of the horses. Counting it over, Danforth laid aside the amount he had demanded for the horses, and put the rest back into Sandy's waistcoat pocket.

"Come, come, chiel," said Sandy, "it's a braw joke I see, but ye ken a joke may be carried too far to be pleasant, then it ceases to be a joke. Don't handle the siller that gate. Pit it back."

"Ten thousand is all I ask for the horses," said Danforth. "Dog cheap, too, taking into consideration the fact that we have furnished you horses for nothing for over a year, and that this is the best lot of horses you will ever get in Minnesota."

"Pit the money down!" cried Sandy, "or I'll mak' ye repent it."

"How?" sneered Danforth. "Civil words, if you please."

"I'll have ye all hanged!"

"Old man," said the captain, sternly, "not another word, you forget that we are outlaws now—men who have little mercy to expect if we show ourselves among civilized people, and who have our lives in our hands even in the backwoods. It would take but little to induce us to silence your babbling tongue forever."

Sandy looked stealthily round him, and the look did not give him much satisfaction. The faces of the robbers were gloomy and savage; there was not one among them who would have hesitated at bloodshed to hide his crimes. The Scot said nothing, and saw them divide the money, Danforth taking a double share. The crafty contractor felt that he was in danger. The men were looking with covetous eyes at the remainder of the money, nearly as great as that already taken.

"It's a fair trade, men," said he, laughing; "it's an onco pressing way ye have with ye; a mon can't resist ye. Untie me now."

"Not yet," said Danforth; "don't be in a hurry; the boys will have something to say to that, I think. I will only take this money; they may do as they please about the rest."

"I think he owes us about so much for a keepsake," said Boynton, gruffly, and then breaking into a laugh; "don't untie him. Come here, boys, I want to talk to you."

The men gathered around him, and he talked to them for a few minutes. When he had finished they came back and tied the speculator to a tree. The rest of the money was taken from his pocket and divided as before. Sandy knew better than to protest; the men looked too savage for words.

Soon after, they began to remove the horses, the speculator looking on in dismay. He saw at a glance that he was ruined—that horses and money both were gone, and even his life was in danger. In the course of three hours they had removed the animals and the glade was deserted. Sandy remained tied to the tree; they did not even look at him as horse after horse was taken away. Danforth had left them some time before, and, taking a new course, set out to reconnoiter the road leading to their retreat.

Hub was left on the ground, not far from the bound man, suffering from his wounds. The last horses had gone, and the men were doing some work in their new hiding-place. At this moment, Sandy was conscious that somebody had glided past him like a serpent. It was Indian John; a threatening look from him had caused the Scot to remain silent. It was the object of the avenger to creep upon the wounded man unawares. Stealthily, not even rustling a leaf or breaking a twig, he came nearer and nearer to his victim. Suffering great pain, the villain was not as cognizant of surroundings as he would have been under ordinary circumstances, and the Indian got near enough to spring upon him, and place his broad hand on his mouth, smothering the cry, which he kept down with difficulty.

Hub looked up in terror, and saw the ferocious face of John within a foot of his own, having such a deadly expression

that he knew if he uttered a sound he was a dead man, hence he kept quiet. The Indian had a knife in his hand which he poised in a threatening manner, and at every struggle on the part of the captive, made a motion to drive it into his heart.

Sandy, although he hated Hub, feared he would be the next victim; but he dared not call for help. John knotted a cord about the arms and legs of the captive, and gagged him; this done, he lifted him and began to drag him away into the thicket. Just as he disappeared, the men came back and caught a glimpse of the Indian. So close was the pursuit that he was forced to drop his prey. They brought back the unfortunate man, wounded in two more places, for the savage had found time, before he fled, to give him two severe flesh-wounds. He seemed to take pains not to approach the life of his enemy, but to torture him in every way. With four wounds already on his person, the profanity of the wounded man was frightful. He threatened the savage with unheard of suffering, if he ever fell alive into his hands.

The malignity of the Indian was fearful. Three times he had had the man in his power, and each time he had been careful to inflict only flesh-wounds, but such as would cause great pain, while, at the same time, they would prevent traveling.

The robbers prepared to depart, this time taking Hub with them.

"Hubbie, lad!" cried Sandy.

"Well?" said Hub.

"Bid them untie me."

"Go to the devil."

"Boynton!" shouted Sandy, "untie me."

"Not if I know myself. Stay where you are; there is no one among us fool enough to free you."

As they left the place they could hear the cries of the unfortunate man, alternately entreating, threatening and coaxing them to set him free, and as they were buried in the depths of the forest, they still heard the sound of his voice.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW IT ENDED.

THE regulators had not been idle. Those who had horses at once set out on a scout, and the rest prepared to follow in the morning. One by one the scouts came back, and at early morning they set out upon the trail. Most of them were men trained to the woods and plains. Among them rode Dick Sands, looking very savage, for he had not forgotten that he had taken the place of Hub, and he had sworn vengeance upon him, but more especially upon George Danforth, who had knocked him down, as the bandage on his head testified.

They had nearly reached the river, on their way to the retreat, when they saw that some one was passing the stream. Steve ordered a halt. As the horseman struggled out of the water, they saw that it was Danforth.

"Silence thar!" whispered Steve; "don't move. Dick, Will, and Dan, stand by to grab him. You, Rugy, don't breathe or I'll hev yer heart out."

The horse of Danforth floundered out of the water, and stood shaking himself like a dog. At this moment Rugy's unfortunate star was in the ascendant. The vicious, hard-headed colt he rode reared suddenly and threw him headlong into the bushes. Danforth heard the sound, and turned his horse's head down-stream, putting him to his speed.

"After him, you three!" cried Steve; "when you ketch him, bring him to Dean's house and wait for us; we won't be long."

It was a break-neck race—neck or nothing—and Will felt a strange, wild joy as he gave his horse the rein, at the same time he saw that their party had an addition. Rugy had mounted and was riding by his side.

"Go back!" said he, sternly. "Why do you come?"

"I ain't goin' to stay with him," replied the boy. "Mebbe you kin drive me back, but I don't think it. He'd lick me; you can't do no more'n that."

Dan went in front at once. His horse was a good one, and there was no better rider in the country. Rugsy rode without a saddle or stirrup, with a rope halter, clinging to the animal like a burr. Dan laughed as he rode, though he never took his eyes from the man they pursued. Danforth looked back over his shoulder from time to time. They caught the savage gleam of his eyes and knew that he was preparing his weapons for action.

"He'll fight," said Dan, looking back at Will, who was about a rod in the rear. "Get your weapons ready; if he raises his pistol, shoot. He gets no mercy from me."

Dan had seen Aggie, and had heard from her the story of the struggle at her father's house, and how this man, giving no heed to the cries of the poor girl, had left her in the hands of her enemy. He had sworn to be even with him for the act.

Down by the shining river, through the tranquil woods, by the silent prairies, went the four horsemen, the eyes of the three bent on the man ahead, and they swept on, relentless as fate, in pursuit of their enemy. Rugsy, excited by the chase, was posturing about in his saddle like a monkey, and shouting at the top of his voice. Once or twice Will cut him across the shoulders; he only answered by another yell. They were closing in on the pursued, and they saw him loosening the pistols in his belt. Not twenty feet separated Dan from him, when the pursued man turned and fired at his enemy's head. Dan ducked, neglecting the principle of the colonel in Mexico, who ordered his men not to dodge the bullets. The youngster heard the sharp whistle of the ball, as it sung by his ear.

Under the neck of his own horse, Apache fashion, he managed to get a shot at Danforth, but the aim was uncertain, and he had succeeded only in wounding the bandit's horse in the neck. The beast reared in pain and uttered a shrill neigh of agony, discomposing the aim of Danforth, who was pointing a second pistol at Will. It exploded as the horse reared; but for that nothing could have saved the young surveyor's life, for the villain was sure of his game at that distance. As it was, he felt a sharp sting, as the bullet cut a furrow along his ribs.

The next moment they closed in on the robber, and a terrible struggle ensued. Danforth had a knife in his hand, out the iron grasp of Will was on his wrist and shoulder, Dan had him about the waist, and Rugy's arms were about his neck. He was a powerful man, and it required their united strength to pinion him and keep him from doing some of them an injury. Rugy at once jumped on his body, flapped his arms and crowed.

"I'll have your blood for this, you brat," the bandit hissed, as the cords tightened on his arms.

"You keep quiet," said Dan, "or it will be worse for you; you have done enough. Do you remember the oath you took in the woods yonder?"

"You forced me to take it."

"You forced it on yourself rather. If you had not pryed into our business you need never have become a regulator by oath."

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked, as they lifted him into the saddle.

"You will be taken to Dean's."

"I won't go there. Don't talk to me. I won't, I won't—you know I won't. I'd die first."

"You can't help yourself, my man," said Will. "You *must* go there."

"I wouldn't advise you to do it. You know why you do it. You hate me—want to humiliate me, I can see. But if you take me there, the first time I get my hands free, I'll put a knife into you. I give you my word."

"Be silent. Our orders were, to take you there. Of course you don't like to look that good man in the face."

"Oh, git out *you*! 'Tain't *that*. You know 'tain't. He kin look any man in the face, he kin. But it ain't a man. It's somebody else."

"No more of that, boy," said Will.

"Then don't let him try to fool *me*. Don't I know *why* he don't want to go thar? Can't I see Miss Cora lockin' out of it all?"

"Boy," whispered Danforth, "get a chance to set me free and you shall have a hundred dollars."

"Eh?" said Rugy. "You don't say?"

"If that is not enough, five, six hundred; a thousand. Come. It will make you rich."

"Can't do it," said Rugs. "Can't, nohow. If it wa'n't for the old man, I would; but, he'd cut me into strips half an inch wide. No, thank you."

They went on with their prisoner. Half an hour's ride brought them to Dean's, who looked surprised as he saw the prisoner. Will took him aside, and in a few words explained all. Dean was shocked that a man who had been treated like a son by him should enter his family only to rob him; but he said little. Cora only gave Danforth a single glance of her dark eyes which caused him to hang his miserable head in shame. He dared not look up, after that; he could not meet her reproving eyes. Nursing in his heart his hatred of Will, he was put into the cellar and barred in. The day was half gone when about half the band returned. Not a word was said as to the fate of the murderous gang who had stolen their horses. It is certain that two of them, the most infamous for their guilty deeds, were never heard of afterward. The Vigilance men had done their work well.

"Where are the rest?" asked Will.

"Coming on with the hosses," said Steve. "We found 'em."

"Did you find anybody with them?"

"Yes, I judge. Don't ask questions afore folks. We've got the hosses back. That's enough. Did you ketch that feller?"

"He is in the cellar," replied Will. "What do you intend to do with him?"

"That's as the men say. He is the head of the hull thing—the chap that set all this trouble agoin'. We will punish him for that as well as for turnin' traitor to us. I judge we've got enough ag'in' him. Hullo! What's this?"

They heard wild cries proceeding from the prairie behind the house. Some of the men ran to look, and there they saw Hub riding at full speed toward the house, mounted on his black horse, while close behind him, looking like an avenging demon, came Indian John. The violent exercise had opened Hub's wounds, and his clothes were dyed by the sanguinary tide. Several men pressed between them, while some seized Hub.

"What is it?" said Steve.

"Him!" said John, sternly, pointing at the cowering ruffian: "Me kill!"

"No. Leave that to us," said Will. "You shall have justice."

"White man's justice! No! He kill John's brother; John kill him; all right."

"You don't understand," repeated Will. "He has killed your brother and you shall have justice such as we can give you. Our law shall do you right."

"No care for *law*," said John, shaking his bloody knife at Hub. "Kill him now."

"Keep him off," screamed the fellow. "Look at me. I'm chopped all to pieces by him. I'm a white man. Save me."

"You a white man?" said Steve. "You ain't half a man. But, don't be afraid. You're safe from him, but you ain't from us."

"I've been punished enough," said Hub. "Save me. Don't hang me. I'll tell you all about the men, and where they are going to get horses this year coming."

"Never mind that," replied Steve. "They won't git no more hosses, most of 'em. Keep back, John. I tell you he ain't to be teched. He's born white, and for that he is safe from you."

John wrapped his blanket about his head and slunk away. But, he still kept the rifle he had taken from Dempsey's house. Danforth was brought out from the cellar and mounted. The cavalcade started on, keeping a jealous watch on the prisoners. They moved toward that spot in the woods where they had made ready to hang Hub the night before. It was a dim and ghostly place, even by daylight, for the trees cast grim shadows over it, and an oppressive stillness reigned on every hand. The rope, which they had used the night before, still hung over the limb, and the regulators drove the horse of Hub under it.

"Last night," said Steve, "we had a meetin' and found you guilty of murder. You are goin' to die for it. Tell us now why you killed the Indian."

"I'll tell you, gentlemen. Upon my word I never meant to kill him," expostulated Hub, in a subdued tone. "I

hadn't no reason to kill him, but, he was our hired guide, and when we got to that place where he was killed he wouldn't go any further, and it came to blows. That's the way it come about."

"Why did he refuse to go on?" asked Will.

"I struck him," said Hub.

"And then you killed him?"

"Yes. I didn't know fairly that I had a knife in my hand until I struck him, and then my fingers fastened on his throat, and he was dead before I had time to think."

"You see this, gentlemen," said Will. "He confesses."

"But you won't hang a man for killing an Indian," said Hub. "Pshaw, you joke! Nothing but an Indian! What if he was killed? So much the better."

"You won't find it so," said Steve. "Now, then, ef thar is any small matter of a prayer you learned years ago, when you was a little one, I'd riccommend you to say it, 'cause it's the last time you'll hev a chaince. Not only hev you killed the runner, but you stole from Mr. Dempsey's last night, to the tune of five hundred dollars. That ain't all. You stole our hosses; and if pritty Aggie Dempsey had not run away, thar's no tellin' what meanness you mout a been guilty of. If this ain't enough to hang you, I'd like to know it! Perhaps it will be a relief to know that your comrade won't be far behind you. Now, that prayer."

"Untie me!" cried Hub.

"The rope, boys. We came near hangin' one of our own boys last night, by mistake. We've got daylight for this job, and the right pig by the ear."

They placed the rope about his neck, his hands tied behind his back and several men seized the cord. Inarticulate curses broke from the lips of the victim, but his struggles were vain.

"Run him up!" cried Steve. The body of Hub was swaying in the air, and some of the lookers-on turned away their heads. At this moment they heard a rifle-crack. Hub had dropped to the full stretch of his muscles, dead. A ghastly hole in his forehead showed where the rifle-ball had entered. The men looked at each other, and those who were hauling at the rope let go their hold and the body fell to the ground. Danforth saw the manner of his companion's death, and for

the first time, began to be terrified. The Vigilance men knew who had fired the shot. They recognized the justice of the deed, and not a man stirred to follow the Indian. All eyes turned to Danforth.

"You next," said Steve, sternly.

"What have I done?" demanded Danforth. "Stolen horses? There is a law against that, and you have murdered my friend. If there is law in the land you shall suffer."

"Do you dare to threaten us?" shouted Dick Sands. "Up with him, boys."

They stripped the noose from the neck of the dead rascal and put it about that of Danforth. His struggles were useless, and in two minutes he was swinging in the air. The stern judges stood looking on in silence when they heard a cry of horror, the swift beat of coming hoofs, and Cora Dean dashed into the opening, reined in her horse with one hand, and with the other, in which she held an open knife, cut the rope above Danforth's head. He fell like a log. Cora quickly alighted and kept back the men who would have seized him again.

"Stand back, all of you," she shouted. "Would you do murder?"

"Murder!" These men never had thought of *that*; but only of vengeance and justice. They paused and looked at each other. Had they, then, in their desire for the last, committed a great crime? The face of the brave girl appalled them.

"Bring water, some of you," she said, lifting the head of Danforth on her knee. "There is life here. Not much, but enough to fan into a flame. What lives you would have to lead with this crime to think upon."

They ran hither and thither like boys, assisting her in bringing Danforth back to life. Some of those in the background hurried the body of Hub out of sight, as she had not seen it. Little by little the life came back to Danforth, and he began to breathe.

"There," said Cora; "take him, and when he is able to move, carry him to the village and give him up to the law. You are my neighbors, and as such I care for you; and I never did you a better service than to prevent you from doing this great crime."

A few words will end this story. Danforth was handed over to the law and condemned to ten years in State's prison. He did not live to work out his term.

"I might not have been so bad, if I had other companions and other teaching. Ask Aggie Dempsey to forgive me. I shall never see any of you again."

The regulators found Sandy tied to a tree, nearly dead from fright. He was treated to a sound flogging, to teach him not to buy stolen property, and allowed to depart. The majority of the band were punished in the same way. What was done with Boynton and another desperado named Payne, no man ever will tell. Not even Will knows that, for they met their fate while he was chasing Danforth.

The surveyors finished their work and went on their way. But when the Indian troubles for which they had been waiting really broke out, Will came back and made Cora his wife, "to keep her out of danger," he said. Mr. Dempsey and his daughter were forced to leave their home and go to one of the villages. Here, from time to time, a bronzed, bearded young man comes to visit them. His first name is Ian, and people say he is to marry Aggie Dempsey, and she does not deny it.

Worthy Steve Pettengill was one of the hastily-recruited company assembled to beat back the savages and did good service. Rugby was also in the ranks, and was celebrated for his skill as a rider and his capacity for getting into mischief. But he did good service nevertheless. Will parted from Steve with real sorrow, and was pleased to hear that he now owns a fine, well-stocked farm, and is getting along well.

Indian John was the first to warn Mr. Dean to leave the dangerous section where he had lived. After that he disappeared. Some said he had joined a village of his tribe, far to the north. Be that as it may, he was never again seen in the oak-openings

THE END.

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Rum's word (temperance). For four gents.
The fatal mistake. For two young ladies.
Eyes and nose. For one gent and one lady.
Retribution. For a number of boys.

DIME DIALOGUES No. 15.

The fairies' escapade. Numerous characters.
A poet's perplexities. For six gentlemen.
A home cure. For two ladies and one gent.
The good there is in even. A number of boys.
Gentlemen or monkey. For two boys.
The little pointer pier. For two little girls.
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A wind-fall. Acting charade. For a number.
Will it pay? For two boys.

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Don't believe what you hear. For three ladies.
A safety rule. For three ladies.
The chief's resolve. Extract. For two males.
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The cat without an owner. Several characters.
Natural selection. For three gentlemen.

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Polly Ann. For four ladies and one gentleman.
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The boy who wins. For six gentlemen.
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The sick well man. For three boys.
The investigating committee. For five ladies.
A "corner" in rogues. For four boys.

The imp of the trunk room. For five girls.
The basters. A Colloquy. For two little girls.
Kitty's funeral. For several little girls.
Stratagem. Charade. For several characters.
Testing her scholars. For numerous scholars.
The world is what we make it. Two girls.
The old and the new. For gentleman and lady.

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To be happy you must be good. For two little girls and one boy.
Evil be out glory. For a levy of boys.
The little peacemaker. For two little girls.
What, art's friends. For two little girls.
Arthur's Washington tea party. For five little girls in old-time costume.
So evil there is in it. For two young boys.
Wise and foolish little girl. For two girls.
A child's inquiries. For small child and teacher.
The cooking club. For two girls and others.
How to do it. For two boys.
A hundred years to come. For boy and girl.
Don't trust faces. For several small boys.
Above the skies. For two small girls.
The true heroism. For three little boys.
Give us little boys a chance: The story of the plum pudding; I'll be a man; A little girl's rights speech; Johnny's opinion of grandmothers; The boasting hen; The law we do not test; A small boy's view of corn; Robby's

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DIME DIALOGUES No. 18.

Fairy wishes. For several characters.
Get rose without a thorn. 2 males and 1 female.
Don't be greedy by half. For three males.
The good turn deserves another. For 6 ladies.
Courtship Melinda. For 3 boys and 1 lady.
The new scholar. For several boys.
The little intercessor. For four ladies.
Antecedents. For 3 gentlemen and 3 ladies.

Give a dog a bad name. For four gentlemen.
Spring-time wishes. For six little girls.
Lost Charlie; or, the gipsy's revenge. For numerous characters.
A little tramp. For three little boys.
Hard times. For 2 gentlemen and 3 ladies.
The lesson well worth learning. For two males and two females.

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An awful mystery. Two females and two males.
Contentment. For five little boys.
Who are the culprits? For three young girls.
Caliban's music. Three males and three females.
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How people are insured. A "duet."
Mayor. Acting charade. For four characters.
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Rememter Benjamin. For three males.
Modern education. Three males and one female.
Mad with too much love. For three males.
The fairy's warning. Dress piece. For two girls.
Aunt Eunice's experiment. For several.
The mysterious G. G. Two females and one male.
We'll have to mortgage the moon. For one male and two females.
An old fashioned duet.
The auction. For numerous characters.

Dime School Series—Dialogues.

DIME DIALOGUES, No. 20.

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| <p>The wrong man. Three males and three females.
 Afternoon call. For two little girls.
 Ned's present. For four boys.
 Judge not. For teacher and several scholars.
 Telling dreams. For four little girls.
 Saved by love. For two boys.
 Mistaken identity. Two males and three females.
 Couldn't read English. For 3 males and 1 female.
 A little Vesuvius. For six little girls.
 "Sold." For three boys.</p> | <p>An air castle. For five males and three females.
 City manners and country hearts. For three girls and one boy.
 The silly dispute. For two girls and teacher.
 Not one there! For four male characters.
 Foot print. For numerous characters.
 Keeping boarders. Two females and three males.
 A cure for good. One lady and two gentlemen.
 The credulous wise-acre. For two males.</p> |
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DIME DIALOGUES, No. 21.

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| <p>A successful donation party. For several.
 Out of debt out of danger. For three males and three females.
 Little Red Riding Hood. For two children.
 How she made him propose. A duet.
 The house on the hill. For four females.
 Evidence enough. For two males.
 Worth and wealth. For four females.
 Waterfall. For several.</p> | <p>Mark Hastings' return. For four males.
 Cinderella. For several children.
 Too much for Aunt Matilda. For three females.
 Wit against wit. Three females and one male.
 A sudden recovery. For three males.
 The double stratagem. For four females.
 Counting chickens before they were hatched. For four males.</p> |
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DIME DIALOGUES, No. 22.

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| <p>The Dark Cupid; or, the mistakes of a morning. For three gentlemen and two ladies.
 That No'er-do-well; or, a brother's lesson. For two males and two females.
 High art; or the new mania. For two girls.
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 The king's supper. For four girls.
 A practical application. For two boys.
 Monsieur Love in America; or, Yankee vs. Frenchman. For four boys.
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 A Frenchman; or, the omitted aunt. For two ladies and one gentleman.</p> | <p>Titanic's banquet. For a number of girls.
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 A rainy day; or, the school girl philosophers. For three young ladies.
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 A May day. For three little girls.
 From the sublime to the ridiculous. For 14 males.
 Heart not face. For five boys.</p> |
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| <p>Rhoda Hunt's remedy. For 3 females, 1 male.
 Hans Schmidt's recommend. For two males.
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 The phantom doughnuts. For six females.
 Does it pay? For six males.
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 Death scene. 2 principal characters and adjuncts.
 Dress and gold. Several characters, male and female.
 Confound Miller. For three males, two females.
 Ignorance vs. justice. For eleven males.
 Pedants all. For four females.</p> |
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 The three graces. For three little girls.
 The music director. For seven males.
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 An unjust man. For four males.
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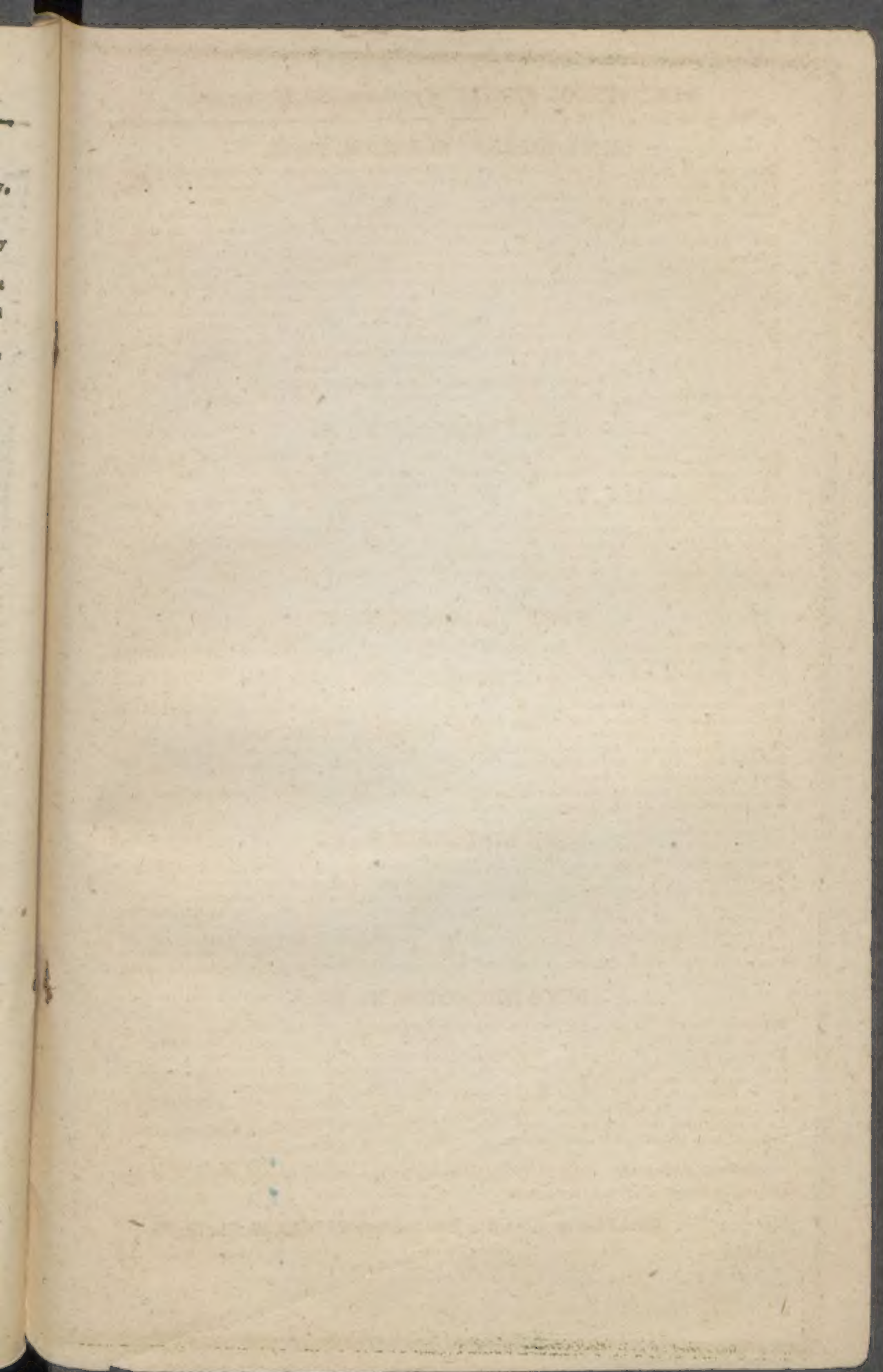
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